



Study on the Styling Characteristics of Dazu Stone Carvings with Bird and Flower Decorations

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Abstract

As a visual art form, shaping the image is the primary focus of Dazu stone carvings. Its flower and bird patterns were influenced by the regional economy, ideological culture, and Song Dynasty painting. The beauty of flower and bird patterns originates from the composition structure, the interplay between virtuality and reality, the rhythm, and the artist's profound understanding of the theme of artistic expression. Choosing the appropriate angle of expression in concrete shapes, having a sense of personalized decorative form, and being rich in the sense of changing rhythm are the fundamental elements of creating flower and bird theme art. It showcases unique folk realism, intriguing exaggeration, and versatile decorative beauty. The flower and bird patterns can create an obscure atmosphere and convey something that is not easily expressed, in order to capture the essence of the photo. This study can serve as a reference for the development and application of traditional flower and bird ornamentation in modern times.

Keywords

Dazu stone carving, modeling, bird and flower decoration

The flower and bird patterns of Dazu stone carvings adhere to the principles mentioned above. They are accurate, well-placed, and appropriately interspersed, aiming to achieve a beautiful decorative effect on the plane while also symbolizing spatial depth. The decorative style of traditional Chinese painting, combined with Western realistic techniques, blends realism, exaggeration, and decoration into one, creating a unique modeling feature. This can be seen throughout the stone carving flower and bird decorations, showcasing the distinct Chinese aesthetic trend in stone carving art.

1. The characteristics of flower and bird in Dazu Stone Carving

1.1 The promotion of regional economic technology

Bashu is located at the intersection of the Yellow River and the Yangtze River, surrounded by continuous mountains as a barrier, diverse terrain, abundant resources, superior natural ecological environment make it a rich agricultural land. Three Kingdoms period (220-280) became a geographical unit of their own, becoming a hotbed of cultural growth and reproduction, making their cultural and artistic features unique and local. In addition, the traditional virtues of the ancestors of Bashu, such as diligent thinking, courage to develop, honesty, and meticulousness, combined with the advantages of many plank roads to anywhere, made Bashu culture and art compatible and restrained. The brilliance of Dazu stone carvings could not be separated from the mature development of Shu's economy and technology at that time.

The rich Bashu land provided a strong guarantee for the excavation of Dazu stone carving. According to records, the Bashu iron smelting industry and salt industry developed rapidly in the Han and Three Kingdoms period, the

industrial chain has been relatively perfect. During this period, some traditional handicraft industries also got unprecedented development, such as the copper smelting industry and textile industry. Handicraft production at this stage, although in a few departments had been dominated by the government, on the whole still carried out in the private way. The development of the handicraft industry also trained a large number of skilled craftsmen, providing a prerequisite for the excavation of Dazu stone carving. The craftsmen of Dazu stone carving in the Song Dynasty were mainly the Wen family and Fu family. Among them, Wen came from Puzhou, which is now Anyue County in Sichuan Province; Fu came from Changzhou, which is now the Dazu district of Chongqing (Chen Zhuo, 2008). Under the creation of these generations of local craftsmen, Dazu stone carving has achieved its glory. In addition, Bashu was a printing center during the Five Dynasties. Until the Song Dynasty, Bashu was also one of the three major printing centers in China. All these became the solid foundation of Dazu stone carving art.

1.2 Implantation of local thought and culture

The stone statues in the Song Dynasty are the product of the increasing Sinicization of Buddhism and the religious carrier of local aesthetics. It embodies the enlightenment proposition of "seeing nature and becoming Buddha" in Zen Buddhism. The philosophical thoughts of Neo-Confucianism, such as "devoting all one's heart to reason", "the heart is the master of everything", and Confucianism, "the right mind is the need", advocate "the mind" (Yan Wenru, 1987). Therefore, Dazu stone carving body in the pursuit of beautiful but not enchanting. It reflects its true, good, and beautiful heart with exquisite facial depiction, and shows its noble identity with beautiful clothes. To show the elegant and holy, credible and respectable, worthy of Chinese worship of the "fairy atmosphere" style. Showing a solemn and dignified, introverted and stable, the pursuit of an "extraordinary" and "refined" ideological realm.

Dazu stone carving was mainly concentrated in the Song Dynasty, the Song scholars advocated the harmony of the three religions and the theorists emphasized that the three religions belong to the good. The thought of the three religions to promote education and persuade people to do good deeds naturally meets the needs of political rule. Emperor Xiao of the Southern Song Dynasty pointed out clearly that the three religions have their own uses. "Cultivate the heart with Buddhism, maintain health with Taoism, and govern the world with Confucianism." Under the advocacy of this ruling thought, local Confucianism and Taoism are bound to have far-reaching influence, and the impact on art is more obvious and intuitive. Confucianism and Taoism in the Song Dynasty have been deeply rooted and deeply rooted in people's hearts, and a mature social order has been formed based on Confucian ethics and moral thoughts. As a foreign religious art form, stone carving must be influenced by the local culture and thought at that time and adapt to its local customs, otherwise, it cannot take root and grow.

Therefore, it can be said that Dazu stone flower and bird decoration is the gradual integration of foreign style and local styles into a new national art style, with Bashu regional culture. Whether it is the subtle and restrained flower decoration, light and elegance, and the realistic antique animal decoration, they are inseparable from these thousands of years of national culture. Dazu Stone carving was mainly built in the Song Dynasty (Li Xiaoqiang, 2022). Confucianism and Taoism were the main ideas and cultures in the Song Dynasty. Both of them put the inner cultivation of human beings in the first place, advocated seeking the true meaning of life from the heart and nature, and emphasized suppressing self-desire and cultivating the mind. As a result, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, after a fierce struggle, embarked on a stage of obvious integration and complementarity, mutual absorption and mutual use, and dominated the general direction of artistic creation of The Times, affecting the artistic aesthetic concept of Dazu stone carvings, and its flower and bird patterns also showed a new look under this influence.

1.3 Influence of Song Dynasty Painting

The expression method of decorative art in the Song Dynasty has reached a mature stage, has been fully applied to various independent art forms, and has certain practical application value. The development of flower and bird painting art will inevitably lead to the diversity and expansion of stone carving patterns so that Dazu stone carving flower and bird patterns have a unique national art charm.

Flower and bird paintings from the Qin and Han Dynasties served a decorative purpose, and the art form continued to evolve until the Three Kingdoms period and the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties. The Tang Dynasty was known for its independent style of painting, which reached its peak during the Song Dynasty. After thousands of years of development, flower and bird painting has accumulated a wealth of creative ideas and techniques, resulting in a unique aesthetic effect and lyrical meaning. Finally, independent of the traditional national cultural forest. From the evolution of decoration, the shift in aesthetic consciousness from ornamentation to realism is quite evident. In

particular, flower and bird painting during the Song Dynasty reached its peak of maturity, showcasing unique techniques, traditions, and artistic characteristics. The main techniques employed were sketching, introversion, and the use of metaphors to depict beauty. The delicate and sensitive minds of flower and bird painters pay great attention to observing and studying the images of flowers and birds. Their goal is to create vivid and lifelike representations, while also emphasizing subjective emotional aesthetics.

The artistic style of flower and bird painting undoubtedly influences the depiction of flowers and birds in stone carving. However, the flower and bird patterns in stone carving appear to have a lesser significance compared to their counterparts in painting. This is because in stone carving art, these patterns are primarily used for decorative and complementary purposes. But when it comes to Dazu stone carvings, people seem to appreciate its unique aesthetic connotation. It can be said that the factors of "human conditions" (including favorable timing, geographical conditions, and human conditions) determine the characteristics of the flower and bird patterns in Dazu stone are mature. The Dazu stone flower and bird decoration, known as the "painting that cannot be separated from sculpture," emphasizes exquisite line shapes, balanced and rigorous compositions, subtle observations of life, and the integration of high artistic skills. According to Guo Xiangying (2000), the incorporation of painting expression techniques enhances the success of the decorative art of flowers and birds carved in Dazu stone. It is the combination of materials and the content of ideas that give rise to the distinctive artistic style of Dazu stone carvings of flowers and birds, allowing them to continue to shine in the realm of national arts even after thousands of years. Specifically, the influence of the paintings from the Song Dynasty is concentrated in the following two aspects.

2. Dazu stone carved flower and bird pattern modeling features

2.1 Simple and thick folk realistic beauty

The most notable feature of the Dazu Stone Carvings is the highly realistic depiction of flower and bird patterns, which reflect a deep sinicized influence in their content. The theme of local life is used to compare with the practice process of Buddhist disciples. This comparison serves as an embodiment of the further integration process of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, and it enriches the content of the grotto art. Flower and bird decorations, from the theme to the mold-making, reflect the characteristics of local folklore. Realism is considered the most effective way to convey art. The flower and bird pattern of this nation emphasizes a realistic depiction of vigorous vitality, healthy shapes, and a sense of vitality. The aesthetic ideal of "vividness of spirit" achieved through the realistic method of "writing in the shape of a character" is reflected in the flower and bird patterns of Dazu stone carvings.

A large number of flower and bird patterns have realistic modeling for the lines and surfaces, resulting in a texture and combination that is derived from the reproduction of the object itself, giving it a mellow and ancient appearance. The combination of strength and weakness, dynamism and stillness, curvature and weight in the picture aims to accurately depict the sense of movement and vitality of the subject matter.

To the west of the southern cliff of Giant Buddha Bay at Baodingshan Mountain, there is a cliff statue known as No. 30. This statue measures 29.1 meters in length and 5.7 meters in height. It consists of 10 pieces of "Mu niu tu song" that are intricately carved to follow the natural undulations of the cliff surface. This work represents the realistic beauty of Dazu stone carvings. From the modeling, the perfect combination of surfaces and lines allows the realistic technique to accurately depict local life interests and aesthetic directions. The depiction of the ten oxen is bold, untamed, and flawless. Their reproduction is inseparable from the creators' keen observation of life and exceptional artistic skills.

In the "Hell Phase Map" of Baodingshan No. 20, the portrayal of domestic chickens in the "female chicken farmer" also effectively captures the folkloric realism of Dazu stone flower and bird patterns. From the selection of content to the modeling features, it showcases the artistic representation of hard-working folk narratives. I believe that the choice of simple and robust modeling techniques is the most fitting approach.

The people in Sichuan used simple and clumsy lines with surfaces to imitate the various objects they carefully observed and understood thousands of times. The peak of stone flower and bird decoration realism appears here.

2.2 Exquisite quiet interest exaggerated beauty

Chinese people often employ an experience-intuitive thinking mode, which emphasizes individual experience, bodily senses, and intuitive perception. It is the "knowing" thinking mode of the origin of Taoist thought. This way of thinking must emphasize the aesthetic inclination towards "expression". "Expression" is often described as divine,

mysterious, unknowable, unpredictable, as well as abstract, free, and perceptual. Therefore, in artistic creation, it is necessary to handle subjective exaggeration flexibly and emphasize the fleeting beauty of interest and curiosity. This allows for the expression of life's tension, emotional rhythm, and spiritual style.

China's traditional art theory also places great importance on expressing the spirit of freehand, emphasizing the need for both form and spirit, as well as necessary exaggeration. This idealized artistic image is also reflected in the flower and bird patterns carved in Dazu stone. General modeling, abstract modeling, and compound modeling are applied flexibly in Dazu stone carvings. The exaggeration and imagination of the flower shapes, the tension in the structures of birds and animals, and the composition are complex and refined, but not trivial. This is because equal importance is given to both line and surface, and all the delicate changes are incorporated into the block surface, creating a cohesive sense of the whole (Li Fangyin, 1998). Bold creation in shape, complex yet not chaotic, diverse but not miscellaneous, with clear primary and secondary elements. The composition belongs to the unique symbol system of Dazu Stone Carvings.

The flower and animal head sculptures decorated with King Kong armor on the right wall of the Shuiyueguanyin Grotto, No. 133 in Fowan, Beishan, are the most representative. The local features of the animal head are exaggerated and enlarged, emphasizing the majestic personality and interesting beauty of the object (Dazu Rock Carvings Research Institute, 2022). The performance of the flowers is also exquisite and small, and the whole gives a delicate and quiet aesthetic feeling.

Beishan No. 155 peacock head is expressed with lines to exaggerate the five features and highlight the expression, the performance about feathers of wings is totally delicate and the overall exaggeration of the details does not lose interest.

Beishan Buddha Bay No. 136 bead hand Guanyin Yinghua flower modeling individual elements delicate and ingenious, the entire arrangement combination elongated, exaggerated to the knee, full of charm.

2.3 Free and simple flexibility decoration beauty

Decorative beauty is based on deformation, and the real picture of the subject matter image is treated with variation, exaggeration, increase and decrease, regularization and geometry, etc. The deformed pattern is decorated with some real components of the object image including concrete factors and conceptual abstraction, aiming at similarity and non-similarity. Deformation aims to highlight the main characteristics of the image, from a variety of vivid realistic image evolution, realistic image deformation, regularization, stylization, and patterning.

The composition of the flower and bird patterns in Dazu stone carvings is complex and compact. The lines are light, fluent, and varied, creating a rhythmic composition reminiscent of Chinese painting. These lines are strengthened or deformed based on the natural growth patterns, reflecting the aesthetic interest of traditional Chinese plastic arts that emphasize the use of lines. Emphasizing or weakening certain modeling factors, whether regular or deformed, can achieve a more visually appealing decorative effect and create a sense of neat, symmetrical balance. This creates a circular and complex rhythm that enhances the overall formal beauty. In addition, there are numerous symmetrical, straight, thick and thin, rigid and soft applications that create an opposite relationship, resulting in a denser feminine and delicate decorative meaning.

Bao Ding Da Fo Wan No. 18 Guan Jing Chang Figure, for example, has two linden trees on the left and right sides of the outer railing. These trees have floating flowers that create a gathering of various kinds of flowers. These flowers are arranged in decorative clusters resembling auspicious clouds. The flower clusters have flexible and simple shapes, with rounded lines that are both elastic and resilient. This presentation showcases the art of free and unrestrained expressive power.

Beishan Fo Bay No. 136 is not empty. Suo Guanyin Corolla features refined modeling with elements of flowers, leaves, and rattan. It abandons the confinement of realistic forms and instead embraces a soft and romantic style. The overall design is beautiful, with smooth and flowing lines. The curves and folds are juxtaposed in a straight and smooth manner, creating a sense of simplicity and emphasizing beauty. The arrangement combines elements of flexibility and freedom, resulting in a visually appealing decorative effect.

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