

Intention and Standing Image: Interpretation of the Aesthetic Intention of Arhat Portrait on Mount Wutai

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Mount Wutai, a place endowed with fine spirits of humanities and prolific remains of Arhats portrait art. The existing Mount Wutai Arhats portrait spans the Ming, Qing, and Republic of China periods, and through the artistic creation of successive generations of literati painters, exquisite Arhats portraits are painted on different artistic carriers. On the basis of inheriting the traditional Chinese paradigm painting expression, the portrait of Mount Wutai Arhats constantly draws on folk nutrients. It integrates foreign Buddhist culture for refinement and sublimation. The reconstructed portrait pays attention to the image expression of its objects and the shaping of spiritual temperament. The shape is ancient and vivid, and the scene is ethereal and mysterious, which rationally expresses the Buddhist philosophy of generosity, benevolence and kindness, and contains unique oriental aesthetics.

Keywords: Buddhist art, Portrait of Arhats, aesthetic idea

Objectives

Since Buddhism was introduced to China from India, the portraits of Arhats have also been introduced, and people's lives and aspects have been influenced by Buddhist culture. The Arhats in Buddhism are loved by the world for their ancient chivalry, generosity and benevolence, so their image culture has also attracted much attention. Most of the portraits of Arhats in Mount Wutai are based on Buddhist classics. As the representative of Oriental spiritual and cultural symbols, Arhats are usually described according to the stories of Buddhist classics, using traditional visual language and integrating Buddhist philosophies. Regarding the aesthetic point of view of artistic intention, the earliest *"The Book of Changes - Biography of Family Words"* said: "The saint stands in the image to express their intentions" (Wang, 2019, pp. 334-337). The ancient sages used the method of establishing the image to express their own ideas, giving aesthetic consciousness to the artistic object, borrowing specific objects to present the beauty of the image, extending to the unity of the artistic object and the subject consciousness, meaning the connection between "image" and "intention". The depiction of the portrait of Arhats on Mount Wutai is the embodiment of the concentrated intention of the ancient literati painters, and it is also a concrete presentation of the collision and exchange of foreign Buddhist art and the excellent culture of the Chinese nation. This paper first starts from the cultural context and development evolution of Arhats portraits. Secondly, it studies the Mount Wutai Arhats portrait system in the Ming, Qing and Republic of China periods

from the aspects of drawing techniques, color orientation, and space construction of Arhats portraits on Mount Wutai. The research excavates the aesthetic value of the artistic language of Mount Wutai Arhats portraits. It truly reflects the spiritual charm contained in the portrait of Arhats on Mount Wutai.

Methods

Exploring and Recalling the Evolution of the Portrait of Arhats

As one of the important themes of Buddhist art on Mount Wutai, the portrait of Arhats traces the origin of its story, and as early as in the later Han Dynasty, when Kangmeng's detailed translation of the "*Sutra on the Rise of the Buddha*", the story of arhats began to circulate. According to the scriptures, "The so-called Kunlun Mountains are the center of Land. The mountains are all precious stones, and there are five hundred caves around them, all caves are gold, and five hundred Arhats often live in them" (Kang, 2008, p. 1). The scriptures not only mention the causes of the lives of the five hundred arhats but also describe in detail the living conditions of the five hundred arhats. With the birth of the story of the five hundred arhats, Buddhist paintings began to appear in China at the end of the Han Dynasty. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, Buddhism flourished, and the Tang monk Xuanzang translated the "*Records of the Great Arhat Nanti Midora*", which said: "When the Buddha Bhagavad Gita was nirvana, he gave instructions to the sixteen great arhats and their dependents with the supreme dharma. Let it be protected, so that it will not perish... The first Venerable name is Bindu Ravara, the second Venerable name is Ganoga Vajra, the third Venerable is Ganoga Vajrayogini, the fourth Venerable is named Supindra, the fifth Venerable is Noghara, the sixth Venerable is Vajradhara, the seventh Venerable is Called Kalissa, the eighth Venerable is Vajradhara, the ninth Venerable is Called Shu Bhagavatam, the tenth Venerable is Named Half Toga, the Eleventh Venerable is named Rajara, the Twelfth Venerable is named Nagasana, the thirteenth Venerable is named Inkarta, the third The fourteenth Venerables are named Varnapas, the fifteenth is name-d Ashdo, and the sixteenth is named Vajrapani Toga. If they are the sixteen great arhats, everything has immeasurable merits such as three clean minds, six clear connections, and eight free liberations, departing from the secular world and practicing foreign scriptures" (Xuanzang, 1983, p. 2). The Buddhist scriptures clearly list the names and numbers of the sixteen arhats and the missions they undertake. At the end of the Tang Dynasty, with the rise of indigenous Dhyana Buddhism, Buddhist art was further integrated with Han culture and folk beliefs, and arhats were separated from the beliefs attached to the Buddha. After that, the sixteen arhats who uphold the Dhamma were revered by Buddhist believers and had the nature of independent offerings, and later developed the eighteen arhats on the basis of the sixteen arhats. It has been suggested that the Eighteen Arhats were eighteen bandits who traveled west to seek liberation, and under the enlightenment of the Buddha, they became eighteen arhats who performed good deeds and pleasures, and often accompanied the Buddha thereafter (Li, 2017, p. 135). Since the Tang Dynasty, the portraits created with the theme of arhats have been influenced by the culture of the Western Regions, and the most representative monk painter Guan Xiu, the portrait of arhats created by him is very exotic, in order to break away from the worldly customs, the portrait has long forehead and deep eyes, long eyebrows and nose, showing the appearance characteristics of crazy, strange and wild, known as "Dhyana Moon Style". Zhang Xuan, a literati painter of the five generations at the end of the Tang Dynasty, painted the portrait of Arhats on the basis of absorbing the traditional paradigm figure painting in China. The portrait of Arhats he made was secular, because of its proximity to the human phase, it was called "world style" or

“secular style”. Thereafter, the image of Arhats with religious overtones was localized. According to Huang Xiufu: “As for painted Arhats, it is said that there are two styles: Cao style and Wu style. Cao style came from Cao Fuxing, and Wu style came from Wu Dong. Cao painted the clothes with thick stacks, whereas Wu’s paintings with simple clothes patterns. Zhang Xuan’s paintings of Arhats follow Wu style” (Wei, 2008, p. 333). During this period, the portraits of Arhats were mainly distributed in Sichuan, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang regions, all of them among the south of the Yangtze River.

During the Song and Yuan dynasties, the secular style portraits of arhats entered their heyday. Famous artists of the Southern Song Dynasty included Liu Songnian, Li Song and other secular painters, who used Dhyana enlightenment to enrich and deepen the portraits of Arhats. For example, on the basis of the traditional style, the Portrait of the Eighteen Arhats has developed new styles such as Dragon Subduing Arhat and Crouching Tiger Arhat. The portrait has a vivid form, exquisite painting, and elegant color. It presents the style characteristics of the fusion of Dhyana rhyme and folk taste, focusing on capturing the expression of the inner emotional world of the Arhat, and continuing the elegant spirit of the literati painters of the Song Dynasty. In the late Song Dynasty, Arhats paintings were accompanied by characters such as dependents, and the portraits paid attention to the depiction of dramatic scenes. During this period, the portraits of Arhats were obviously rich in folk interest, which showed that Buddhist art had entered the life of common people. The portraits of the Arhats of the Song Dynasty, which tended to be extremely popular, were circulated in Suzhou, Hangzhou, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Shandong and other regions. In the Yuan Dynasty, the turbulent situation of the country became stable, and the exchange of religious beliefs, culture and art was integrated. The cultures of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism were fused, and the artistic style of Arhats portraits was further developed. In addition to inheriting the elegant painting style of the Song Dynasty, in terms of the identity of the creators, the Portraits of Arhats are mostly from folk craftsmen. Different from the literati painting style of the Song Dynasty, they extend the exquisite decorative techniques of folk painters. The Portraits of Arhats are brightly colored, rounded and roughly stained with ink, especially the use of techniques such as color, gold, and ink powder. Therefore, they contributed a new development in craftsmanship. However, the Portraits of Arhats in the Yuan Dynasty were rarely preserved, and only a small amount of them survived in the northern region.

In the Ming Dynasty, the Mount Wutai area left a large number of exquisitely painted Portraits of Arhats. The most representatives are the “Five Hundred Arhats Listening to the Dharma” of the Bodhisattva Manjusri Hall of The Foguang Temple on Mount Wutai; the portrait of the Arhat on the east wall of the Mahavira Hall of the Princess Temple of Fanshi County; the portrait of the Arhat of the Mahavira Hall of Yeshan Temple in Fanshi County; and the rare treasures “Eighteen Arhats” in Xiantong Temple, Mount Wutai, portraits of Arhats in Bodhi leaves, etc. The picture layout of the Bodhi Leaf with hundred flowers blends with the natural vein texture, and the special materials create eighteen arhat portraits with unique Dhyana meaning. The Portrait of Arhats of Mount Wutai in the Ming Dynasty presented the characteristics of localization on the basis of continuing the style of predecessors, and the image of Arhats in most of the masterpieces at this time was not only an idol with the nature of religious worship, but also evolved into a portrayal of the heart of the literati painter. Through the depiction of natural scenes and forms, these works create an idealized Buddhist sacred realm, which plays an important role in highlighting the personality characteristics of the arhat characters.

In the Qing Dynasty, the portraits of the Arhats of Mount Wutai were also widespread, such as the “Eighteen Arhats” and the “Five Hundred Arhats Crossing the River” left behind at the Treasure Temple in Fanshi County. In addition, the “Five Hundred Arhats Ritual to Buddha” of the Republic of China period is also a treasure of the portrait of the Arhats on Mount Wutai.

Analyzing Mount Wutai Arhats Portrait Artistic Language Characteristics and Aesthetics

The portraits of Arhats on Mount Wutai are concentrated in the Ming, Qing and Republic of China periods, and are known for their grand scale, rich themes and superb painting skills. In Mount Wutai, literati painters, with rich imagination and creativity, have created a magnificent and vivid religious dojo where Buddhism and the common talk are shared, where the secular scene and the eternal art space complement each other. The development of the Portrait of Arhats on Mount Wutai presents different artistic characteristics depending on different times and categories.

(1) “Ancient and Elegant Dhyana”: Portraits of Arhats on Mount Wutai in Ming Dynasty

The Bodhisattva Manjusri Hall at Foguang Temple on Mount Wutai houses portraits of Ming Dynasty arhats. Foguang Temple belongs to the outer monasteries of Mount Wutai South Terrace. Bodhisattva Manjusri Hall is located in the front yard of Foguang Temple, facing south, with brick and wood structure, is the earliest existing Bodhisattva Manjusri Hall in Mount Wutai, and it is also the largest existing Bodhisattva Manjusri Hall in China. The portrait area of “Five Hundred Arhats Listening to Dharma” in Manjushri Hall is 101.35 square meters. It mainly distributed in the lower part of the east, west and north walls of the Bodhisattva Manjusri Hall. The east wall is 23.6 square meters, and 64 arhats are painted; The western wall is 33.7 square meters, with 75 depictions of arhats; The north wall is 44.5 square meters, 109 depicted arhats. There are 259 statues in total. Later, because the mud and skin of the east wall fell off, 11 of them were damaged, so there are 248 statues in existence. Such a large-scale portrait of the Arhats theme is really rare in China. The portrait of the Arhat Manjushri Hall does not retain the ink of the corresponding painting year, but according to the “Narrative of the Cast Bell of the Great Foguang Temple” on Mount Wutai, the year of the portrait should be the fifth year of Ming Xuande (A.D. 1431). In addition, according to the inscription “Rebuilding the Stele of the Foguang Temple to Supplement the Sculpture of the Arhat”, the content of the supplementary image in the hall was also recorded: “... Later to the Xuande period (A.D. 1426-1435), there was a master, nicknamed Zhao’an, ... three thousand Buddhas in murals, ten thousand Bodhisattvas, and five hundred Arhats in painted colors” (Cui & Luo, 2019, p. 35). The five hundred arhats painted on the east, west and north walls of the Manjushri Hall are divided into two layers of arrangement. The upper arhats are standing behind the lower layer, whereas the lower arhats are sitting in a coiled shape. They are separated by rocks, auspicious clouds and other objects. The arhats have different shapes and are full of rhythm. For example, on the north side of the west wall of Manjushri Hall, a group of arhats playing music is drawn, and the arhats look focused, as if they are intoxicated by the wonderful world of Buddhahood. Careful observation shows that no matter where the arhats are, their expressions will focus on the master Manjushri who speaks in the middle at the same time, and the Arhats who are fascinated by the world of Buddhism are all engrossed in listening to the Dharma, and vividly draw the grand holy realm of the Arhats like thousands of miles of clouds when they listen to the Dharma.

In “Five Hundred Arhats Listening to Dharma”, the portrait of the Arhat is simple and bright, the image is tranquil and lofty, and the meaning is ethereal. The physical appearance of the Arhats are similar in appearance to real people, and their body, muscles and bones are in line with the natural proportions of the human body. Arhats were shaped in tall or short, young or old, strong or thin. They have complex and diverse movements in all kinds of shapes: bowing or standing, leaning forward or backward, looking left or right, or sealing hands, closing eyes and meditating. At the same time, the painter pays great attention to the details of the Arhats modeling, emphasizing the dynamic changes between different Arhats and the emotional communication between each other. For example, there are wise old people who are shaped like thin cranes, or who sit cross-legged firmly, or hold objects in front of their chests; there are young and talented people who are sturdy and strong, or who sit cross-legged with their feet loose, or who have their feet hanging on the ground and their sleeves folded, and their postures vary. Arhats have obvious regional characteristics of the Han people, and there are also peculiar and ugly statues of Brahma. Luohan’s facial expressions are exaggerated, and his expressions are beautiful and colorful, or amiable and pleasant; or he laughs and speaks, and he is full of ambition; or he looks calm and pays attention.

“Five Hundred Arhats Listening to Dharma” is extremely decorative, and the overall color is light and ethereal. Folk painters have a unique ingenuity, not only highlighting the image of the individual arhat and paying attention to the overall coordination of the arhat group but also making subtle changes and adjustments in the tone. For example, the appearance of Arhats is mainly light-yellow skin color, in addition to white, red, brown and other different skin tones. The expressions, skin colors and postures of adjacent Arhats are relatively strong, so as to achieve the effect of setting off each other. Each portrait of an arhat has a headlight on its back, and the multicolored headlight contrasts with various skin tones. Most of the clothes worn by the Arhats are similar, and they are the clothes that monks often wear. The clothes are mostly red, pink, blue, yellow, orange, brown and other monochrome colors. The clothing is neat and the pattern is drawn freely. In addition, Arhats are slightly different in their way of dressing. Some have belts around their waists, some have their upper bodies bare, and some use the same or different color matching at the edge of their robes, and the matching is exquisite, in order to enrich the colors.

There are also portraits of Arhats painted in the Mahavira Hall of the Princess Temple of Fanshi County. Princess Temple belongs to one of the nine temples outside the north of Mount Wutai. The temple covers an area of 4,638 square meters from north to south, and is composed of three courtyards, symmetrically along the central axis. There are portraits of Arhats on all four walls of the Mahavira Hall of the Princess Temple, a total of 98.99 square meters. The picture integrates the gods of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism into one, combined with various changes. Both the east and west walls are centered on the Buddha, forming a grand scene where all the gods arrive and the immortals worship the Buddha. Among them, the top layer of the east wall shows the portraits of the eighteen arhats that the common people love to see and hear, with 9 painted on the left and right, in a symmetrical shape. The shape of the arhats is ancient, and the shape emphasizes the use of the brush in the bone method of the Tang and Song Dynasties. The starting and turning of the drawing method are powerful, and the dynamics of all the arhats are natural bhikkhus. The overall color contrast of the Arhats statue is strong, but the head light behind the Arhats is mainly adjusted by light and elegant green and white, which is different from the multicolored headlight of the Arhats image in the “Five Hundred Arhats Listening to Dharma” of the Bodhisattva

Manjusri Hall of the Foguang Temple. Folk painters use their ingenious expressiveness to paint a complex but not chaotic portrait of the Arhat Listening to the Buddhism.

Similarly, portraits of Arhats were painted in Mahavira Hall of Yeshan Temple in Fanshi County. The existing murals are mainly distributed on the east, west and north walls of the Mahavira Hall, with a total area of 33.18 square meters. The existing portraits on the north wall have the largest area of 20.89 square meters and are relatively well preserved. The whole portrait is divided into three layers: upper, middle and lower. Among them, sixteen arhats are painted symmetrically on the east and west sides of the uppermost layer. All the Arhats have headlights behind their backs, and their hands hold objects or hold sutras, or fold their hands together, all dedicated to the Buddha. The plate left the ink inscription of the second year of Jiajing (A.D. 1523) in Ming Dynasty.

Located in Taihuai Town, Mount Wutai, Xiantong Temple is one of the five Dhyana philosophy places on Mount Wutai and the first temple on the whole mountain. The “Eighteen Arhats” preserved in Xiantong Temple is a unique artistic carrier form of Mount Wutai (Wang, 2003, pp. 88-89). “Eighteen Arhats” consists of 12 portraits of bodhi leaves. Ding Yunpeng, a painter in the middle and late Ming Dynasty, skillfully used the natural contours and shapes of various leaf veins on the bodhi leaves and painted the shape of arhats on them. Ding Yunpeng’s image of Luohan is sublimated after inheriting the style of the monk painter Guan Xiu in the late Tang Dynasty. The structure of Luohan’s skull and facial expressions are exaggerated, and the eyebrows and eyes are thick. In particular, the eye uses the method of strengthening the hook line to emphasize its rhythm structure, so as to achieve a strange and vulgar picture effect. Some of the eighteen arhats in the smaller leaves are sitting on rocks next to trees, some are meditating, some are chanting scriptures, and some are equipped with rare and exotic animals, decorative instruments and props. Its clothing pattern is consistent with the texture of tree poles, stones, animals and other lines, and it is changed by light and heavy, lifting and pressing. The portrait of the Arhat in Bodhi Leaf’s “Eighteen Arhats” contains the interest of traditional Chinese landscape painting with brush and ink, fully embodying the changing characteristics of traditional Chinese painting, with delicate pictures, popular artistic conceptions, and elegant and simple style. It embodies the ancient temperament of “painting arhats is not strange but makes his eyebrows look like an eternal person with thriving Tao and Qi, and inspire people with awe” (Hu, 2001, p. 135).

(2) “Introducing Customs into Painting”: Portraits of Arhats on Mount Wutai in Qing Dynasty

There are a large number of Portraits of Qing Dynasty Arhats in the Treasure Temple of Fanshi County, Mount Wutai. Treasure Temple is located in Zhongzhuangzhai Village, east of Fanshi County, Shanxi Province. It is surrounded by mountains in the south and surrounded by bay water in the north, and also belongs to one of the Nine Temples outside the North of Mount Wutai. The temple faces south and is divided into east and west courtyards. The existing main hall of the east courtyard Guanyin Hall was built in Ming Dynasty. There are portraits of Arhats on the east and west walls of the hall. Among them, “Eighteen Arhats” and “Five Hundred Arhats Crossing the River Map” are exquisitely drawn, on the basis of the penetration of folk secular customs, showing the phenomenon of great integration of calligraphy and painting with customs. The portrait of “Eighteen Arhats” is located on the east and west walls of the temple, and nine arhats are painted on each of the two symmetrical walls. Eighteen Arhats are all seated, backlit behind them, surrounded by auspicious clouds,

staggered arrangements, so that the picture presents a natural and flexible state of rhythmic undulating. The nine arhats on the east wall echo with the nine arhats on the west wall, and the images of the Dragon Subduing and the Crouching Tiger arhat that the world likes to see are located in the center of the two walls. In the process of the eighteen arhats, there was much controversy about the names of the last two, until the Qing Dynasty, when Emperor Qianlong designated the last two being His Holiness Gaya and His Holiness Maitreya, respectively. So far, the Dragon Subduing and Crouching Tiger Arhats among the Eighteen Arhats finally had fixed names.

The “Diagram of five hundred Arhats crossing the river” is painted on the south wall, and the portrait is left with ink inscriptions and poems. Below the west wall, from south to north, there are seven statues of arhats crossing the river, and the portrait of the arhats may be dressed in red robes, holding the Big Dipper Seven Star Array Chart, and their legs are meditating in an upward look; Or wearing a bucket hat on his head, holding Buddha dust, and crouching on the altar of reed leaves; Or carry a bag, hold a Dhyana staff, and ride a dragon to cross the water; Or wearing a robe, twisting the Buddha beads in his hands, talking freely, standing on top of the god fish; Or wearing a black robe, fingers in the air, in the form of an inclination; All the arhats stepped on the holy relics and put their heads on the back, and the line echoed from beginning to end. Interestingly, the image of Sun Wukong holding a golden hoop stick appears in the picture, and the costume shape in the portrait is consistent with that contained in “Journey to the West”.

The Qing Dynasty Arhat paintings in the Guanyin Hall of the Treasure Temple in Fanshi County, Mount Wutai, have distinct characteristics and vivid shapes. Folk painters use the ancients’ way of putting seals into paintings in terms of brushwork. The lines are simple and strong, giving up the use of the stroke to press the details; The restless style is full of life, and there is no literati’s weak and impetuous habits, and it pursues the simple and simple atmosphere of Song and Yuan Dynasties. The overall color of the portrait is thick and heavy, and the colors are complementary to each other, especially the cyan and blue colors are used in many places in the portrait. Consequently, the tone is clearer and brighter than the previous generation. The content of the portrait is obvious and easy to understand, and the image of the arhat drawn is closer to the public aesthetics. The portrait is colored, the god has both form and shape, the look is peaceful, and the dynamic is random. If the head light and Dhyana costume of the arhat in the portrait were removed, the image resembles an ordinary man in life, and the inherent divinity in Buddhism is diluted and the human nature is fully revealed. The theme of the Mount Wutai Arhats portrait in the Qing Dynasty integrates Buddhist classics and folklore, which is a concrete embodiment of the secularization tendency of the Arhats portrait, and also the extension of the content of the Arhats portrait of Mount Wutai.

(3) “Simple and Mellow”: Portraits of Arhats on Mount Wutai in the Republic of China

Mount Wutai has preserved a precious portrait of the Arhats of the Republic of China period, the content of which is “Five Hundred Arhats Ritual to Buddha”, located in the The Mahavira Hall of the Jin-Ge Temple (Golden Pavilion Temple) on Mount Wutai. Located on the Jin-Ge Ridge in Taihuai Town, the layout of the Jin-Ge Temple is connected by stone caves in the front and back courtyards. According to The Inscription of Gu Runcheng’s “Reconstruction of the Stele of the Jin-Ge Temple on Mount Wutai”, “In the first year of the Republic of China (A.D. 1912), the construction started with the abbot Dafangtonggong... In the ninth year of the Republic of China (A.D. 1921), the opening light was passed on to five hundred arhats and an altar, so brahmans

relied on this to increase their glory, and the Dharma became more and more prosperous” (Cui & Wang, 1995, p. 45). From this stele, it can be seen that the portrait of the Arhat in the temple was created between the first year and the ninth year of the Republic of China. The “Five Hundred Arhats Ritual to Buddha” painted on the east, west and north walls of the temple. The north wall is badly damaged, the east and west murals are well preserved, and the existing portrait area is 50.12 square meters. The content of the portrait depicts a grand scene of five hundred Arhats praying to the Buddha. The whole picture adopts a landscape-style composition, with mountains and rivers as the main vein, and the arhats travel through it in groups.

The “Five Hundred Arhats Ritual to Buddha” begins above the south wall, painted in turn with pine trees, and the arhats sit in a row on the hard stone under the tree. The Arhat in the portrait is either walking, sitting, bare-handed, or holding a magical instrument... They all look different but walk together. The portrait on the east side of the north wall shows the arhats sitting on the rock and continuing to the middle, and the west side of the north wall begins with a building hidden in the clouds.

The arhats also extend to the middle, and the surrounding arhats are standing, with their hands folded towards the Buddha in the center. The western mural begins with weeping willows hidden in the clouds, with the Arhats marching in groups. Looking at the portraits of the three walls in the Mahavira Hall, it can tell that the painters were good at managing things. His Holiness the Arhats have different forms, either whispering to each other, walking sloppily, or arrogantly, leaning on a staff and marching. The procession of worshipping Buddha walks beside the mountain, turns near the water, all of which face the Sakyamuni Buddha in the Buddhist altar. The whole picture forms a huge visual effect in the style of hundreds of rivers returning to the sea, which is unique and extends the overall momentum of the portrait. The original statues and portraits in the The Mahavira Hall of Jin-Ge Temple in Mount Wutai contrast and complement each other, forming a Buddhist world where sculptures live because of painting and paintings that are real because of sculpture.

“Five Hundred Arhats Ritual to Buddha” is rich in style and language, and there are many Arhats but no repetition. While paying attention to the overall arrangement of the portraits, the folk painters also have in-depth expressions on the individual Arhats. For example, the image of the Arhat painted in the north mural is very naive, playing with the naughty boys, and the cultivation of the Arhat’s charity and benevolence is vividly depicted; Another example is the contemplative portrait of Arhats on the west wall, painted with an exaggerated posture and a dashing shape. The overall brushwork is generous and steady, the strokes are free, naive and smooth, no longer pay attention to the setback of the technique, but focus on the exploration of the ancient and simple artistic conception, and the rounded state advocated by Buddhism appears in the picture. The scene is quaint and easy-going, mainly ink and pastel, the ground peaks are decorated with warm colors, the sky is blue and cobalt, the overall tone is cool, and the Arhats in multicolored costumes are interspersed with mountains and rivers, making the whole image full of vitality and wild fun.

In short, during the Ming and Qing dynasties and the Republic of China, the portraits of Arhats on Mount Wutai were not only influenced by the Buddhist paintings of their predecessors, but also developed their own secular appearance. In the Ming Dynasty, the portraits of Arhats showed the charm of ancient methods, with delicate style, elegant colors, exquisite attention to details, and the pictures were full of rhythm. In the Qing Dynasty, Arhats portraits were influenced by folk painting techniques, usually using symmetrical composition to pursue decoration, paying attention to bone strength with lines, and setting colors with enthusiasm. During the

Republic of China period, the portraits of Arhats on Mount Wutai were characterized by ancient methods, with rounded lines, jumping and easy-going colors, paying attention to the separation and rhythm of the picture scenes, and conveying meaning in shape, which was the ingenuity of literati painters.

Results: The Conceptual Presentation of the Portraits of Arhats in Mount Wutai

The portrait of Mount Wutai Arhat is an imaginative form of painting construction. It is the result of the long-term fusion, learning and sublimation of Buddhist art and traditional Chinese painting. It reflects the unity of traditional Chinese painting object creation and artistic spirit. The portrait of Mount Wutai Arhat has been circulated for thousands of years, and its unique visual language contains a strong oriental sentiment.

(1) Sublimation and Construction of Skills

The portraits of Mount Wutai Arhats not only have traditional flat portrait forms, but also have three-dimensional figurative language, as well as special medium portraits of bodhi leaves, which outline their own characteristics of brush and ink according to different materials and media. For the composition and color processing of the portraits, the literati painters adopted the flat and direct narrative composition, which is more acceptable to the general public, and its panoramic and symmetrical composition is endowed with rhythm due to its complexity and change; Its repetitive and monolithic composition makes the imagery open in artistic conception due to the simplicity of its constituent elements; The trend of coloring varies according to the time and the situation. Some decorations are quiet and simple, nostalgic and elegant, and some are quaint and gentle, loose and fresh. The painting language is mature, the brushwork is broad and steady, exquisite and ethereal, and the portrait of the Arhat is lofty, natural and expressive, and constructs the characteristic image of the Chinese-style generosity and benevolence of the Arhat.

(2) The Presentation of Artistic Spirit

Spirituality and rhythm are the main artistic features of the Wutai Mountain Arhat portrait system. Zhang Yanyuan said in the "Records of Famous Paintings of Past Dynasties": "The art of calligraphy and painting needs to be made of spirit" (Zhang, 1964, p. 104). Spiritual temperament is the root of Arhat's portrait art. Buddhism pays attention to the unity of Buddha and self. Under this concept, Buddhist art pays attention to expressing spirit through form, combining both spirit and form, and paying attention to the transmission of the spiritual world. The artistic spirit of Buddhism is embodied by the aesthetic conception of the unity of matter and form. Conveying the spirit is a high artistic realm, which requires feeling the emotional expression of the creator from the heart and understanding its visual form beyond the object. The portrait of Mount Wutai Arhat realizes the fusion and transformation from divinity to humanity. First of all: during the process of Sinicization, the images of the Arhats of Mount Wutai gradually evolved from warriors of the gods to wise men with peaceful demeanors in the world. Secondly, after the Yuan Dynasty, integration of the three religions, the Confucian principle of benevolence and righteousness, and the Taoist way of nature were integrated into the Buddhist doctrine, so that the original focus on the divinity of the Buddhist world was gradually transformed into a secular presentation, in order to realize the ideal realm of the harmony between man and nature in Han culture. In addition, in the portrait story of Arhats, plots such as folk customs and fashions are integrated, which reflects the real-life status, reminds the world of art, and reflects the artistic spirit of ancient literati painters.

(3) Inheritance and integration of cultures

“A history of Buddhism, a hundred art palaces” summarizes the cultural characteristics of the portraits of Arhats on Mount Wutai (Guo, 2019, p. 56). The existing Mount Wutai Arhats Portrait Group spans the Ming, Qing and Republic of China eras, and is the only group of Arhats portraits with continuity in China, which can be called a living fossil in the history of Chinese Buddhist art. The theme of the Portrait of Arhats in Mount Wutai integrates tradition and reality, so that the expressiveness of the portrait can be extended. For example, the portraits of Arhats in the Ming Dynasty in the Manjusri Hall of Foguang Temple in Wutai Mountain are painted on the east and west walls. There are Arhats playing the reedpipe, the Arhats playing the flute, the Arhats holding the gongs, the Arhats with tripods, and the Arhats with percussion instruments in the back row, etc. Numerous Buddhist musical instruments and images of Arhats are drawn, showing the world’s longing and pursuit of the Buddhist world, and also showing the grand scene of Buddhist activities in Mount Wutai at that time. The portrait truly records the social situation at that time, and was a realistic portrayal of the history and culture of its folk customs and Buddhist activities.

Conclusion

In a word, the Portrait of Mount Wutai Arhats is a splendid and colorful cultural and artistic relic of the Chinese nation. Its cultural context has continuity and inheritance, which completely records the ancient Buddhist culture and life style from the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the Republic of China. It has extremely high historical document value and artistic research value. With extraordinary artistic imagination and creativity, the portrait of Mount Wutai Arhats presents the image concept of the integration of form and meaning on different art carriers, expanding the connotation and application boundaries of Buddhist art. It promotes the cross-regional and cross-field publicity and exchange of Wutai Mountain Buddhist culture. The portrait of Mount Wutai Arhat is a splendid Buddhist art scroll. It shows its own charm with mysterious, vast and harmonious brush and ink.

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