

A Study on the Influence of the 8th Century A.D. Image of Feitian in the Mogao Caves on the Character Design of Modern Chinese Films

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doi:10.56397/AS.2023.12.10

Abstract

The Dunhuang cave community represented by the Mogao Grottoes is the most dazzling historical legacy of the development of the Silk Road civilization, and the murals in the Dunhuang caves are the “witnesses” of the development of human civilization, the crystallization of the convergence and integration of ancient Chinese civilization and world civilization, and the valuable heritage of the Chinese nation. The art of Dunhuang murals has further developed and changed through different epochs and cultural fusions, and the contemporary interpretation and innovation of its aesthetic concepts, artistic styles, and cultural values have become particularly important and valuable. In the context of artistic creation in the eighth century A.D., this study examines in-depth the stylistic characteristics of the Flying Sky image in the Mogao Grottoes; using methods such as observation, investigation, analysis, etc., and through the study and research on the styling of modern animation characters, it is found that the copying of the ancient art can not realize its maximum value, and that the traditional art can be inherited in a revolutionary way by disseminating it through the medium of modern media.

Keywords: China, Mogao Caves, frescoes, Feitian, film, image design, media

1. Introduction

Dunhuang is a major town on the Silk Road, a place where the cultures of the Central Plains and the Western Regions have blended since the first two centuries. The Mogao Caves, represented by the Dunhuang Grottoes, are the most dazzling remnants of the development of the Silk Road civilization. The murals in the Dunhuang Grottoes are “witnesses” to the development of human civilization, and are the culmination of the convergence and integration of the ancient Chinese civilization and the world’s civilization, and illustrate the prosperity and development of Chinese civilization, which is a valuable legacy of the Chinese nation. Nowadays, China has experienced rapid economic development and has been steadily leaping into the ranks of global powers, and the excellent traditional Chinese culture has also been upgraded to a brand-new stage, which has given the excellent traditional Chinese culture the connotation of the times (Jane Zhang et al., 2022). Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes mural art has undergone further development and change through different epochs and cultural fusion, and the contemporary interpretation and innovation of its aesthetic concepts, artistic styles and cultural values have become particularly important and precious. Historically, the study of Mogao Grottoes mural art has been based on the outline of Chinese historical dynasties, outlining a linear historical perspective.

In this rich treasure trove of Chinese culture, all kinds of art have their own special forms and charms, and with the archaeological development of Dunhuang and the establishment of the Dunhuang Research Institute, the art treasures that have been preserved for thousands of years have been carried forward. The most striking of these

are the murals in the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang, which reflect the collision and fusion of foreign and traditional Chinese cultures, especially the flying skies of the eighth century AD (Tang Dynasty), with their lithe postures and flowing sashes. Applying it to the characters will give them new vitality.

This paper is devoted to the study of the artistic image of Feitian in the Mogao Cave murals of the eighth century A.D., as well as its stylistic features, aesthetic characteristics and its typical symbolic elements; and how to apply its typical elements in modern animation design to combine tradition and modernity, resulting in a new image with artistic vitality.

2. The Artistic Characteristics of the Flying Murals of the Mogao Caves in the Eighth Century A.D.

2.1 The Aesthetic Pursuit of Figure Painting Modeling in the Eighth Century

Beautiful, smooth, graceful, gorgeous, grand, full-bodied and so on have almost become synonymous with the description of the eighth century aesthetic. To explore the aesthetic pursuit of figure painting in the eighth century (Li Min Yue et al., 2023), we need to study and summarize the following three aspects.

First, the influence of the overall environment on the aesthetic. In the eighth century, this specific calendar period, the aesthetic of the people born in China and the interaction of the Western countries formed by the sense of beauty. According to historical records, the Tang Dynasty sent monks to the Western Regions to obtain scriptures, and at the same time admitted many monks and a large number of foreign students in their own country, and also maintained close contact with the northern Hu people and ethnic minorities. In this way, foreign cultures, foreign cultures and local cultures collided and fused with each other, forming a comprehensive aesthetic orientation.

Second, the character temperament and flavor. The spirit and emotion of the times conveyed by the characters through their external physical appearance, dress, demeanor, and mannerisms. The cultural spirit of the eighth century shows its richness and maturity, and the spirit of the eighth-century people who were born in such a social and cultural environment is particularly spirited and enthusiastic. This conveys a sense of prosperity, abundance and grandeur, of extreme social prosperity and full intellectual and cultural openness. In such an era of strong vitality, all morbid, weak, and pretentious will be deftly discarded.

Third, the characteristics of painting. Since there is no authentic trace of the ink wash painting method created by Wang Mochizuki, the only way to explore the aesthetics of figure painting in the eighth century is to explore the aesthetics of figure painting with lines in the brushwork and white drawing methods. As the figure paintings of Gongbi are delicate and realistic, the strokes of the lines are well-proportioned and careful, and thus “iron line drawing” and other painting methods are mostly used. The white strokes, represented by Wu Daozi, used a painting method with a gentle and smooth momentum. It can be seen that the aesthetics of painting at that time was the coexistence of rigor and neatness, as well as the fluidity of the painting.

2.2 Historical Background and Aesthetic Characteristics of Flying Sky Murals

The term “Flying Heaven” refers to the heavenly beings in the heavenly palace and the heavenly beings who perform rituals and music and dance. Buddhism is categorized as a part of the Eight Dragons of Heaven; Qianpu is the god of music, soaring in the sky of the Buddha’s country, emitting fragrance and offering treasures and flowers for the Buddha; Guanala is a deity specializing in song, who can not fly, and his main duty is to play musical compositions and dances (Luo Xuan, 2023). With the spread of Buddhist theories and the need for artistic creation, the duties of Qianxu and Guanala were gradually blended into the image of the flying sky, which was lively, dynamic, able to sing and dance, and soaring in the sky.

The creation of the flying sky in China is dependent on Buddhism. Legend has it that at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, Emperor Ming of the Han Dynasty dreamed of a golden Buddha, so he sent a man to the Western Regions to obtain the scriptures, and Buddhism began to spread in China from this point on. After the death of the Han Dynasty, in the war-torn Wei, Jin and North-South Dynasties, Buddhism sent a remedy to the weather-beaten people, making them forget their pain and voluntarily exchange their present suffering for a happy life in the next life. Therefore, Buddhism spread greatly at this time and reached prosperity. At the same time, the artistic image of Feitian also rode on the great ship of Buddhism and firmly established itself in Chinese art.

In a broader sense, “Flying Sky” is an immortal soaring in the sky, often carrying people’s marvelous fantasies and infinite aspirations. The highest state of Taoism in China is to become immortal. That is, according to the monks, the very first stage of Taoism is to achieve immortality and become an immortal or god on earth; on this basis, if you continue to cultivate, the higher realm is to be able to fly up to become immortal. However, these immortals are not of high rank (Muse, 2022), and their flight is accomplished with the help of wings, just like the angels in the Bible. The higher level Chinese immortals have the same physical appearance as ordinary people, and they can fly freely without wings through some kind of idea or divine power.

Thus, the image of the flying sky in Chinese mural paintings, although influenced by ancient Indian Buddhism, is a result of traditional Chinese ideas and cultural concepts of gods and monsters. Buddhism gives its nature and function, Confucianism gives its spirit, and Taoist thought gives its floating body and dashing soul. Thus, its shape is born out of a composite spiritual culture and has an inimitable uniqueness.

2.3 The Aesthetic Characteristics of the Eighth Century Flying Sky Murals

Flying image of the eighth century, on the basis of the previous generation, exotic flavors for reference, the Chinese culture as the root, the formation of its special style. This style of a more simple and bright image of sunshine in front of the world, it is joyful, powerful, confident and energetic, honest and robust and courteous. The affirmation and recognition of its own strength and ability has created the free and confident demeanor of Feitian; the desire for health and fullness of Feitian has ignited the vitality of life and changes in many forms. As an artistic image, Feitian reflected the whole powerful weather of China at that time in every aspect, and it was the typicalization of the whole social and cultural life.

3. The Modeling Characteristics of the Flying Sky Murals in the Eighth Century Mogao Caves



Figure 1. South wall of the main room in Cave 172, Mogao Caves

The murals in Cave 172 show Flying Sky flying among the clouds, which is why they are thin. Flying sky (Figure 1) for the front side flying, seems to be dancing. Arms bent upward, slender fingers, soft waist, slightly elongated legs, the whole body was a smooth arc. The eyes are looking downward with a happy expression. Feitian's body is straight, straight up in the air, legs lengthened, arms rounded, hands close to the head, full of the dynamics of speeding flight. Facial nan round, eyes gleaming.

Mural, some of the flying sky wearing semi-transparent and lightweight sundress intersected between the chest. Wearing a long printed skirt, long skirt with a half-waisted skirt, waist tie colorful belt, qipao slender and fluttering with the wind. Her head is sworn in clouds and she wears precious beads. She wears necklace on her arms and neck. Thin eyebrows across the eyes, full lips, rounded face, fully embodies the ideal feminine beauty. There are also flying half-naked upper body, wearing a brocade skirt underneath (Ren Haiming, 2023), the waist tied with a colorful belt. Brocade skirt long and feet, layers and layers, looks very gorgeous.

These murals on the flying sky, in the body, clothing and other external contours of the carving with thicker lines, with the pen light and heavy changes obvious. Especially in the texture of the clothing and the expression of the folds, the thickness of the changes in the exaggerated, thus reflecting the different layers of relationships. On the other hand, the fine parts of the clothes, the five senses and other fine parts are more delicate, and the lightness and weight of the lines are even. Thick lines show the degree of contour and solidity, while thin lines emphasize the lightness of the material and the detailed tracing.

In terms of color scheme, these flying skies are heavily used in stone green and orange. The hair of these flying skies is dyed green, a color that is rarely seen in flying skies styling. The combination of green and orange color is full of the contrast between cold and warm, which makes the whole image look lively and vivid.

According to the above description of the main flying sky on the eighth century Mogao Caves murals, in this period of flying sky modeling has many commonalities, that is, more dress with a long skirt, or a long skirt with a half-waisted skirt. The color of the long skirt is mostly warm color printing, or with white, or solid color without printing long skirt. The ribbons are thin and long, and usually consists of two colors on both sides, which are mostly red and stone green. They are rich in dynamics, and their postures are richer and more exaggerated than those of bodhisattvas (Wang Xue, 2022). The posture is dignified and lively. The colors are mostly red, white and green, and the tone is calm and steady. There are different variations in the lines on the human body,

the five senses, the clothing pattern, and the contour, and the workmanship and variability coexist. Their overall modeling reflects a joyful, pleasant and free atmosphere.

4. Possibility of Using Flying Modeling Elements in Animation Character Design



Figure 2. Movie *The Nine-Colored Deer*, China, 1981

As an aesthetic object, the eighth-century image of the flying sky was able to merge with the design needs of the stylized features of the animated characters after being refined (Yin Hong, 2012). For example, the image of the dancer in *The Nine-Colored Deer* (Figure 2), although the story is taken from Northern Wei mural paintings and draws directly from the characteristics of the mural paintings of this period in most of the modeling of the animation. However, the entire modeling of the dancers is filled with visual elements of the eighth century (Tang Dynasty) Flying Chihuahua. For example, in the hairstyle they all adopt the popular swan sideburns of the Tang Dynasty (Zheng Chengsheng, 2023), and the slender cape on the dress dances with the wind. Long waisted skirt and half-waisted skirt matching, accessories, etc. are the eighth century flying image of the visual elements of absorption.



Figure 3. Movie *New Gods: Yang Jian*, China, 2022

In the movie *New Gods: Yang Jian* (Figure 3), the nymph's styling is similar to that of the Flying Sky of the Sheng Tang Dynasty in terms of the movement of the flying posture, the flowing cloak and the dignified makeup are all extracted from the image of the Flying Sky of Dunhuang. The characters are also similar to the flying temperament of the eighth century. From this, we can see that the common elements of the eighth century Dunhuang Mogao Cave murals and the combination of animation character styling design has the possibility of realization, and can produce a certain sense of beauty (Zhijing, 2018). In the process of integration and application should be based on the needs of animation character modeling features.

5. Conclusion

In today's Chinese cultural industry, most of the market has been occupied by Japan, Korea, Europe and America. They keep exporting their unique culture and art through film and television and other means. In the field of animation, American films and Japanese comics have swept the Chinese market. In order to meet the market demand and maximize economic benefits, Chinese animation blindly follows the trend (Zhu, S. S., 2023), thus losing the promotion and development of the national culture and hindering the dissemination of traditional thought and culture. Therefore, art and design based on traditional themes need to be promoted more and have an impact on the world.

The Flying Sky art of Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes is the essence of artistic aesthetics and cultural thought. Therefore, the design of movie and television characters with the eighth century Flying Sky as an element is not only the inheritance of Chinese painting art, but also the promotion of Chinese culture. It can empower modern film and television images, and at the same time, it can let more people understand Mogao Grottoes, recognize the art of Chinese painting, and spread, carry forward and develop the national culture.

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