

## COMPARISON BETWEEN DAZU ROCK CARVING DANCE IMAGE CHARACTERISTICS AND DUNHUANG GROTTOES

Liang Tang<sup>1</sup>, Manissa Vasinarom<sup>2</sup> and Hu Xiaodong<sup>3</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to study comparison between Dazu Rock Carving Dance and Dunhuang Grottoes in terms of their image characteristics. The time period of this study ranged from August 2022 to March 2023. This paper adopts the literature research method, interview survey method, network survey method, description analysis method. The research results show that the secularization of Dazu stone carvings is the unique cultural feature of Dazu stone carvings. On the aspect of aesthetic features of Dazu Stone Carvings dance from Tang Dynasty to Song Dynasty, the props, body forms, costumes, image styles and facial features in Dazu stone carvings dance images became more and more localized and regional as time went by. The Song Dynasty is an important stage of divinity and humanity. The object of comparison in this paper is not limited to religion and simple grotto art itself, but among other styles of Song Dynasty art, the Dunhuang murals are selected for cross-text comparison, and the dance images of Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang murals are discussed from three aspects: dress, body form and expression mode. Thus, think about the new value orientation of dance creation and choreography. It is helpful to excavate and interpret the dance culture of Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang mural paintings, and can have referential value for the study of traditional folk customs, traditional arts and national aesthetics of Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang mural dances. The research result also has a positive impact on dance creation and choreography of Chinese classical dance.

**Keywords:** Dazu Rock Carvings; Dance Modeling; Image Characteristics; Aesthetic Features

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<sup>1</sup>Master's degree Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

E-mail: s64563806004@ssru.ac.th \*Corresponding author

<sup>2</sup>Asst.Prof., Ph.D., Fine and Applied Arts Faculty, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

<sup>3</sup>Professor, Ph.D., School of Art, Jiangxi Normal University

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Dazu Stone carvings and Dunhuang Grottoes are two famous grottoes in China. Since the Northern Dynasty, Dunhuang grottoes and Dazu stone carvings had formed a complete system, and there has been a saying that South Dazu north Dunhuang. It is also a masterpiece of different times and regions in the history of Chinese grottoes and an irreplaceable masterpiece in the history of human culture. What are the differences and similarities between Dazu rock carving dance and the famous Dunhuang dance and how do the researchers discover the dance elements and the possibility of reinvention? In this paper, the overlapping time of Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang grottoes is extracted, and representative samples are selected for comparative study and analysis.

## 2. OBJECTIVE

This paper analyzes the cultural similarities and differences between dances in Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang Grottoes by comparing their costumes, body forms and ways of expression in different dynasties. And the research result is beneficial for the promotion of those dances and has great referential value for future study in terms of Chinese classical dance.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The dancing icons within the Dazu Rock Carvings represent some of the most accessible and pertinent research materials. The portrayal of these icons encompasses methods such as the analytical examination of dancing statues and the choreographic interpretations dominated by the dancing figures of the Dazu Rock Carvings. Existing iconographic methodologies, including “pre-iconography” and “iconography,” are already established in scholarly discourse, with Panofsky’s “Significance of Visual Arts” providing a foundational and systematic framework. In this work, the scholar delineates fine arts into three dimensions or tiers: the interpretation of the icon’s natural meaning, the discernment of the traditional or thematic significance of the icon, and the exploration of the underlying or profound content of the icon. Panofsky posits that such iconographic analysis can facilitate the categorization of icons, and this auxiliary research helps observers identify the thematic essence, historical period, and geographical context of the artistic expression. Delving into the profound interpretations of various icons on this foundation falls within the realm of iconographic analysis, a field that evolves from basic icon interpretation (Panofsky, 2011, P6). Therefore, in examining the relevant dancing statues of the Dazu Rock Carvings, this paper investigates the connection between fundamental icons and their underlying connotations. It does so by analyzing various dancing statues and exploring the dancing imagery and symbolic meanings conveyed through these representations.

There are many studies on Dunhuang Grottoes in Chinese literature, and the typical studies on dance in Dunhuang grottoes are as follows: Wan Ningnan’s essay Cultural Characteristics of Dunhuang’s Dance Art and Analysis of Art Development analyzed the development features of Dunhuang dance art and pointed out that the Dunhuang dance catered to the aesthetic feature of the social public, including the general public’s unrestrained spirit as well as sympathetic sentimental characteristics. By arranging and tidying up the images of Dunhuang

images, he proposed the style and form regenerations in the traditional classical dance. He also explained the basis of Dunhuang dance's aesthetics from three dimensions, including aesthetical style, cultural melting, and humanistic media. Then, a new ideology and understanding of the development of Dunhuang dance art has been proposed. It should be noted that the study can also start from the view of dance art's commercialized development and technological extraction.

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

##### 1. Literature research method:

This paper involves a large number of information from previous literature, website or books in the library. The contents and scope of literature collection and collation are mainly focus on aesthetics, religion, dance theory, sculpture, culture and history.

##### 2. Interview:

The researcher of this paper has interviewed 15 staff in Literature and Art Departments relevant to Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang grottoes on the basis of field research so that readers can have a comprehensive understanding about the dance images of Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang grottoes, understand their current development trend and current situation, and enrich the relevant materials of the dance image culture of Dazu stone carvers and Dunhuang grottoes.

##### 3. Network survey method:

With this method, the researcher had to obtain the materials on the Internet. The Internet information is efficient and extensive, which is helpful to the collation and collection of the dance culture of Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang Grottoes and have some advantages over the paper statistics, such as larger volume information more than paper books. Meanwhile, it can enrich the relevant information of Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang Grottoes dance culture and update information timely. By classifying and comparing the information, To analyze the similarities and differences between Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang murals.

##### 4. Description analysis:

Based on the data and information about dance images in Dazu carvings and Dunhuang grottoes, the researcher has conducted a detailed analysis with reliable software.

#### 5. RESULT

The secularization of Dazu stone carvings is the unique cultural feature of Dazu stone carvings. From the aesthetic characteristics of Dazu stone carving dance

1. From the Tang Dynasty to the Song Dynasty, props, body forms, costumes, image styles and facial features in Dazu stone carving dance images were more and more localized.

2. The Song Dynasty is an important stage of divinity and humanity. The object of comparison in this paper is not only limited to religion and simple grotto art itself, but also selects Dunhuang murals for cross-text comparison among other styles of Song Dynasty art.

3. Discuss the dance images of Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang murals from three aspects including clothing, body form and expression, so as to think about the new value orientation of dance creation and editing.

Table 1

*A comparison between Dazu Stone Carvings and Dunhuang frescoes of different dynasties in terms of clothing, body forms and ways of expression.*

Time	Content	Dazu Stone Carvings	Dunhuang Frescoes
Late Tang Dynasty	Clothing	Hair in an updo, facial erosion blurred, wearing a collar, naked to the waist, wearing trousers, the head covered by the silk, with surrounds the armpit to fly behind.	The clothes are light and light. Holding the flower plate, gem, hand incense burner. Playing Qiang flute, hand scattered flowers, offering Buddha. Reflects a kind of "heaven and man shared sorrow" religious realm.
	Limb Morphology	Raise arms left and right, place your left hand at the back of your body, and hold an offering with right hand. Right leg bent under the abdomen, left leg flexion and extension behind, the whole body was a "U" shape, do Buddha flying.	The elements of the flying sky appear: the shape of the flying sky is 45 centimeters long, and the female image has a bun, a flowing headband, a round and fuzzy face. There are ribbons at the shoulders, which are shuttled in the double axils, and the feet are not shown, hidden in the long skirt.
	Mode of Expression	bas-relief	Mural painting
Five Generations	clothing	The statue is about 15 centimeters tall, wearing a bun and a crown, with long and round face, collar, pendant necklace, with upper body in oblique collar axils, wearing under pants and head being looped by silk, with floats behind the armpit and armband.	Although the flying apsaras painted in the hole are not as lively as those in the Tang Dynasty, they are very decorative. For example, grottoes have a harp guzheng and a harp flying sky, chest decoration, arm decoration bracelet, waist long skirt, hands plucked strings, elegant posture. The flying scarf is three times longer than the body. There are swirling flowers in the middle, and colorful clouds flow on the face. The whole picture is symmetrical and equal, and it is highly decorative.

	Limb morphology	The image on the left hand holds a lotus bud in the left hand, and a tray containing flowers and fruits in the right hand. Squatting and kneeling in moire, feet do not appear. The right image holds the flag in both hands, and the other features are similar to the left image. The images are placed in circular moire.	Two flying head bunched hair, curved eyebrows big eyes, straight nose small lips, round face, earlobe ring timid, half-naked upper body, barefoot flying like flying against the wind in the color to go.
	Mode of expression	Stone relief	Mural painting
The song dynasty	clothing	Breastwork, inside the monk branch, tie for knot, under the long skirt, short skirt, long skirt wrapped feet trailing behind. Shoulder cloth, part of the broken, along the body potential backward flying. His left hand bent on the tray, his wrist bracelet. The contents of the dish, dish height 5, diameter 20 cm. The right arm is bent to the right waist, at the wrist stump.	In a cave in the late Song Dynasty, the top of the cave was covered with four drapery, and some were holding flowers and some were playing music to offer offerings to the Buddha. Its Dongpo north of the two body flying, image posture is more perfect. The two bodies of the flying sky are tied in a bun, wearing a beaded crown, naked upper body, necklace, arm necklace, full face, beautiful features. A skill holding flower plate, a skill Feng Shou Konghou.
	Limb morphology	East side: The head is destroyed, the body faces northwest, the body is "U" shape, the shoulder width is 36, the chest thickness is 18 centimeters.  West side: Head length 33, shoulder width 37, chest thickness 22 cm.  Attitude to the east side ◦	On the wall of the Tiangong fence, they are in full bloom, flying against the wind, with flowing dresses and long belts. On the flying sky, flowers are falling in a row, and under the flying sky, clouds are swirling. Although it does not have the momentum of the flying sky of the Tang Dynasty, its dynamic flight is also very vivid, which can be said to be the representative works of the flying sky of the Song Dynasty.
	Mode of expression	Stone carving, high relief	Mural painting

It can be seen from the comparison between Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang murals (Figure 1. Figure 2):

1. More lateral movements are seen in dance modeling. On the body form, the hands are crossed, the soles of the feet are slightly bent, with one leg lying on the side and the other leg bent, which are the unique movements of Dazu stone carving dance.

2. Dazu stone carvings have small bending range of flying sky, crotch, leg, shoulder and waist, and no wide-opening and closing movements of the body. Hand movements are only two-handed split support, most of which are hands drooping, horizontal or standing wrist, finger movements are also small, occasionally little finger cocking, while Dunhuang dance has prominent hand movements. There are fewer musical Instruments in hand, mainly trays, lotus holding and more sections.

3. The changing forms of clothing began to decrease in the Song Dynasty, but there were still some complicated decorations. In terms of features, there is no deliberate emphasis on the slimness of the lower body, which is also related to the relatively short clothing. These parts are the essence of Dazu stone carving dance, but also the value of Dazu stone carving dance.

Figure 1

*Female Flying Apsaras' Statue 1 in Dazu Rock Carvings*



*Source: Baidu page of Dazu Stone Carving, searched on August 1, 2023*



Figure 2

*Female flying Apsaras' Statue 2 in Dazu Rock Carvings*



*Source: Baidu page of Dazu Stone Carving, searched on August 1, 2023*

The difference between Erdazu Stone Carvings and Dunhuang Grottoes dance images.

1. The two caves were built in different times

The era when Dunhuang Grottoes were built was accompanied by the rise and fall of the Tang Dynasty, which was also the most brilliant era of the Chinese nation. No matter in terms of financial resources, material resources, and different artistic types, a hundred flowers blossoming and it can also create a grand image of Dunhuang grottoes. The construction of Dazu Grottoes was completed in the late Tang Dynasty, the Five Dynasties war and the Song Dynasty, so it must have a completely different dance image and temperament.

2. The geographical location of the two grottoes is different

The two grottoes are located in two different places, people's living habits and customs are very different, by the local culture image is large, which determines their clothing, modeling, decoration and other aspects of the difference. Dunhuang frescoes are closer to the western part of China and are greatly influenced by the western culture. The dance images are more of the artistic characteristics of Xinjiang and the Western Regions, while Dazu stone carvings are more influenced by the Central Plains culture.

The common points of Sandazu Stone Carvings and Dunhuang Grottoes dance images.

1. Dazu is far away from Dunhuang, but they are relevant to each other and intimate each other. Although Sichuan has high mountains and steep roads, it has long had access to Gansu and Shaanxi in the northwest since ancient times. It shows that the different cultures of the two places have been widely spread and exchanged very early. Therefore, Dazu stone carving dance culture has new development and innovation on the basis of inheriting and learning from Dunhuang art.

2. They have the same religious identity and the same apsaras themes. When Niche No. 135 statute in Beishan Fowan is compared with the grottoes in Mogao Grottoes in the Western Wei period, their dance styles and characteristics are also very similar. The four bodies of the stone carvings in Beishan Fowan meet head to tail, and the flying characteristics can be seen everywhere in the caisson on the roof of Mogao Grottoes in the Tang Dynasty.

## 6. DISCUSSIONS

1. The geographical differences between Dazu Rock carvings and Dunhuang Grottoes lead to great differences in their dance culture and image. The dancing images of Dazu Stone Carvings and Dunhuang murals have the same religious identity, and both have the same content of flying sky.

2. Dazu Stone carving dance culture has new development and innovation based on inheriting and learning from Dunhuang art. At present, compared with Dunhuang Grottoes, the excavation and research of Dazu stone carvings dance elements are still less. Government departments and scientific research groups should increase the development and utilization of Dazu stone carvings dance, and dance workers should create more works related to Dazu stone carvings; so that the grottoes art with Chongqing characteristics can be better displayed in front of the world.

## 7. ORIGINALITY AND BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

To sum up, the main difference between Dazu Rock carvings and Dunhuang Grottoes lies in the difference of historical conditions and culture, which is reflected in aesthetic and artistic styles and presents different dance image characteristics. There are also great differences in the artistic accomplishment and technological level of artists themselves. The dance image of Dazu stone Carvings is different from that of Dunhuang frescoes mainly in the time when the first Dazu stone carvings and Dunhuang grottoes were built.

## 8. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Implication of the Study

1. The artistic realm of Dazu Rock Carvings dance choreography remains scant, with no more than five works to date.

2. The choreographed dances inspired by Dazu Rock Carvings warrant innovation, particularly as numerous significant choreographed works based on Dunhuang Grottoes stand as potential guiding examples for the evolution of Dazu Rock Carvings dance choreography.

3. Current efforts to preserve the tradition of Dazu Rock Carvings' dances have proven insufficient; thus, concerted efforts must be undertaken to bolster awareness and appreciation in the coming years.



## 2. Recommendations for Future Research

An exhaustive analysis of the application of Dazu Rock Carvings' statues within the realm of dance art reveals that future choreography can be innovatively crafted at a technical level, using materials drawn from historical and cultural contexts. This approach may uncover the impetus for cultural development, anchored in the perspectives of religious, ideological, humanistic, and aesthetic evolution.

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