

Monumentality in Religious Art

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Abstract:

In the paper, the author did the research of the monumentality in religious art, based on the definition of monumentality and monumentality by Wu Hong. The content and form of ancient Greek Parthenon, ancient European churches and ancient Chinese religious architecture are analyzed and compared with individual cases, which revealing the commonness and difference between the monumentality of China and the western countries. The architectures and sculptures have monumentality, while in China, the graphics have monumentality. The meaning of monumentality is power, represented by balance in the West and concentration in China.

Keywords:

Monumentality, Monument, Religious Art

1. Introduction

The discussion on monumentality has been aroused by scholars abroad. John Brinckerhoff Jackson: “Monuments can be anything.” Wu Hong said: “monumentality (defined in the New Webster International English Dictionary as the state and meaning of remembrance) refers to the function and continuity of a monument. However, a monument can still exist in a material sense even after it has lost its function and educational significance. Thus, the relation between ‘monumentality’ and ‘monument’ is similar to the relation between ‘content’ and ‘form’. Therefore, only if a monument with definite ‘memorial’, it has content and function.” According to Alois Riegl, “Monumentality does not exist only in ‘intentional’ ceremonial memorial buildings or sculptures, but also in ‘unintentional’ objects (such as ruins) as well as anything of ‘chronological value’.” [1]

So what is monument and monumentality? In CNKI there are a few references about this concept, the related research is few and far between. On the one hand, the reason is that in China, there are few research in this concept, meanwhile, it is a controversial that there are artworks with monumentality in the history of China. On the other hand, this concept is an applicable word in the context of western ancient art. Is it suitable for using it in Chinese context? Yin Jinan considered that the word is only applicable for context of comparison between China and the western countries. The concept proposed by the scholars listed in the previous paragraph has been recognized, and it is clear that the relation between monument and monumentality are the relationship between content and form. Monumentality is the intrinsic memorial

and ceremonial function that truly makes an object a monument, and it has to do with remembrance, continuity, and political, ethnic, or religious obligations. Monuments can take any form.

On the basis of Wu Hong's definition, there is no doubt that the ritual form contained in religious art points to its monumentality, but the form and content shows differently in different kinds of religious art.

2. Monumentality in Ancient Greek Religious Art (A Case Study of the Parthenon)

2.1. The Parthenon is a Monument

The Parthenon, located on the Acropolis in Athens, Greece, is now in ruins. When visiting the temple, people are always amazed by its exquisite columns and carvings. However, nowadays the analysis of its monumentality must go back to its original context.

As we can know from the reconstruction, the Parthenon was used to dedicate to the goddess Athena, sacrifices and ceremonies. A gold and ivory statue of Athena stood at the center of the temple. Meanwhile, the temple sits on a rectangular platform with a Doric colonnade forming the border of the altar. The four walls of the temple are decorated by sculptures with the theme of ancient Greek mythology, with complex elements such as human, demigods, gods and animals.

It is no doubt that such an architectural structure has a ceremonial role, and such a ceremonial nature shows the monumentality of the Parthenon. Furthermore, the architecture and sculpture are the form of monument.

2.2. Monumentality of the Parthenon

Was this monumental building just built in memory of religion? What is worth mentioning here are the carvings decorated on the walls of the partitions. The carvings on the west side describe the mythical struggle between the Amazon and the Ancient Greeks in the Amazon Basin, the partition which describes the war between gods and giants is on the east side, and the partition which shows the Trojan War is on the north side. It is important to mention about the south side carvings, as shown in Figure 1, which shows the struggle between the Greeks and the Centaurs.



Figure 1. The half-man and half-horse relief on the walls of the Parthenon.

Historical studies have shown that the Centaur symbolized the barbarians in the ancient Greek view, and the centaur in the south carvings are the Persians. In Persian war, Athens was destroyed by Persians. Therefore, the Greeks had to rebuild the city after the war, including the Parthenon. It is important that in order to rebuild the temple they used the funds of Delian League which is led by Athens. What is more,

after the rebuilding of the Parthenon, it became the location of the vault, which means the Parthenon is built in memory of the victory of the war. Therefore, except to commemorate the religion, a deeper significance of the essence of the Parthenon temple monumentality is to commemorate the Persian war, the dominating status of Athens which means an ideology, shows Athens first, and a symbol of power.

2.3. *Historical Extension of Monumentality*

Today, because of the fault of civilization, the Parthenon is now in ruins, and the memorial of its religion and power has lost in the past. However, the remaining significance of the Parthenon is only a symbol of Greek culture. In addition, the construction of the Parthenon was unified by the vote of the general assembly, which points to the early democratic politics in the Western countries. Therefore, nowadays the Parthenon is also a commemoration of democratic politics.

3. Monumentality in Christian Art (About Churches)

3.1. *The Monumentality in Christian Art-The Churches*

For most ancient churches, whether Romanesque, Gothic or Byzantine, the changes in style did not affect their religious memorial, and they were always built in a cross-shaped plane structure. If we go into the church, there is a vertical space, where at the end is the main altar of the church. Generally, the altar paintings or sculptures are put on the main altar, such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Rock of Notre Dame* which is an altar painting. We can see that the function of the longitudinal structure: the Christians face to the end of the longitudinal structure and worship (as shown in Figure 2, the circulars on behalf of the Christians, the direction of the arrows indicate direction of their worship.) However, all that follows is that the main altar is monumental.

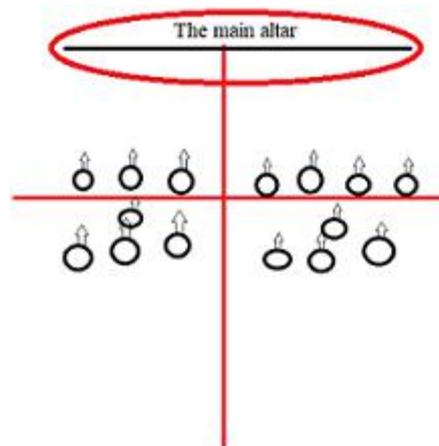


Figure 2. *The orientation of worshippers during the worship service in the church.*

However, in the article named *The Reconstruction of The Abby Church Art at St-Denis (1231-81): The Interplay of Music and Ceremony with Architecture and Politics*, the procession of Christian festivals is recorded, with a strictly regulation of itinerary, starting from a certain point and ending up at the church for the worship. [2] Also in modern society, there are rules of etiquette for entering a church, dress code, not to cross the altar and so on. Therefore, as a Christian, his worship has already started when he goes out and decides in his mind "I am going to church today". Therefore, the worship facing the main altar is only a part of the liturgical process, and the church building is the main body with the monumentality.

3.2. *The Monumentality of the Churches*

3.2.1. *An Expensive Function*

The Arles Saint Trofemi church in the eaves of the bow carved with a glorious surround of Christ, in this part of the carving, the artisans used a number of repeated and complex patterns to represent the halo of Christ, the Christ's folds are multiple and complex, the details pf of wings and even the feather are expressed to the extreme. And this is just one of many carvings. The only purpose of such costly engravings was to express ideas related to the Hadith. [3] (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Christ in St. Trofemi's Church.

The only functional carvings also appear in the Cathedral of our Lady of the Flowers: religious carvings adorn the exterior walls with delicate patterns. Variations in style and complexity only complicate the building and cost more manpower and resources. (Figure 4)



Figure 4. The decorations on the Cathedral of our Lady of the Flowers.

In Hegel's view, romantic architecture (Gothic architecture belongs to romantic architecture in Hegel's view) is generally characterized by the elimination of pure application and purpose, and such buildings seem to have no practical value, but they are essentially fit the purpose of Christian worship. [4] Therefore, the special structure of gothic churches must have frescoes of colored windows, as well as a large number of decorations and carvings. Meanwhile, the production of such gothic colored windows requires very high requirements on materials and technology. Although this shows the ceremonial function, it makes the construction of Gothic churches extremely expensive.

The Sistine Ceiling has same problem, which was built at great expense. For example, when the Pope entered his private oratory, he did not appreciate art as people do today, but as an object of ritual. This costly function not only means that the monumentality of the church is in the religion, but also reveals the essence of the monumentality - the patrons.

3.2.2. The Patrons

Who spent so much money to build these lavish churches? The Cathedral of our Lady of the Flowers, for example, which was built under the patronage of the Italian tyrant Cosimo di Giovanni de 'Medici. And the Sistine ceiling was paid by Pope Giulio II. They represented two different classes, the nobility and the Church. In fact, in European history, the construction of churches was usually funded by the nobility or the church. Meanwhile, in the history of European, trade-off and struggle between theocratic and principalities has always been a political characteristic. Thus, the “church patrons” involved principalities/noble struggle with theocratic complex issues. And church and aristocracy both hope to build a church for his feat, so we can draw the conclusion: on the surface, the essence of the monument of the church is to commemorate Christian, but the truth is that the trade-off between sovereignty/aristocratic and theocratic, these two kinds of rights and ideologies.

3.3. Historical Extension of Monumentality

In the present Europe's last remaining royal family has become a symbol. The Pope's territory nowadays is only the Vatican. And the monarch and theocratic in the monumentality of the churches have become the past. In addition, except the religious ceremonial function, many churches become memorials to periods of history: the virgin duomo became the symbol of the Renaissance. The Gothic church symbolizes the medieval age. Some churches have even become museums commemorating the art of the past.

4. Monumentality in Chinese Religion (the Power of Graphics)

4.1. A Complex Graphical System

Why do people think of Taoism when they see the eight diagrams? What is more, the same lotus means the Buddhism. And Confucius had a standard look. This kind of direction is given by the graphics. For example, in the picture on the right, the figures are endowed with a clear signification and divinity. When dust, buns, doctoral hats and gestures are removed, these three statues obviously lose their clear direction and become “ordinary people”. That is because in the development of Chinese history, a complex graphical system has been formed on the noumenon of cognition, and it is a system of group identification.

4.2. Modular Production of Buildings

In his book *Ten Thousand Things: Modeling and Large-scale Production in Chinese Art*, Lothar Ledderose discussed Chinese architecture. He believed that there was a phenomenon of modeling production in Chinese architecture. Although the brackets and beams and columns as buildings' models cost material and financial resources, they have a substantial effect on the architecture itself. [5] As the illustrations in the book show, the development of brackets, while complicating the craft, added to the stability of the building, but this craft had no ceremonial function. The same is true of

beams and columns. In addition, such models are not limited to the using of religious buildings, but also used in palaces, gardens and other residential buildings. In ancient China, there are precedents for changing the residence of Kings into temples, such as Beijing Purdue Temple was originally Duergun Palace, and Yonghe Temple was changed into lama Temple, etc. Since such buildings were not originally built for use as places of worship, unlike churches in the West built specifically for acts of worship, they have no monumentality at all.

But how does such a building satisfy religious use and worshipping behavior when changing its use?

The truth is that the graphics have that power. By drawing graphics with different meanings on the same building, the artisans made the building have different ceremonial functions. For example, the fence in front of the Baxian Palace in Xi 'an, Shaanxi province, is decorated with graphics of eight trigrams, which clearly symbolize Taoism, giving the building a religious field. (Figure 5)



Figure 5. Baxian Palace, Xi 'an, Shaanxi [6].

Therefore, the conclusion has been made clear. The graphics assume the monumentality of Chinese religion and become a idolatry, opposed to Christianity.

4.3. Graphics, Religion, Politics

4.3.1. Three Religions in One

Since the introduction of Buddhism into China, the trend of the integration of the three religions began. The unification of the three religions refers to the trend of mutual influence and integration of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in Chinese history. There are three stages in Chinese history: Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, Tang and Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties: the rise of metaphysics in the Wei and Jin dynasties was the mutual absorption of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, the Neo-confucianism and Zhu Cheng Neo-Confucianism in The Tang and Song dynasties, the unification of religious forms was formed in the final stage of yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. The unification trend of social consciousness reflected the gradual strengthening of autocratic monarchy.

The emperor plays an important role in the religion, which means emperor's orientation determines the rise and fall of religion. Buddhism, for example, obsessed with the rise the heat of Buddhism because of the Southern Dynasties Wu emperor who keened on Buddhism. However, the northern wei dynasty Taiwu emperor was launched the Buddhist persecutions which happened five times in the Chinese history.

These sports are all determined by the taste of the emperor, the same as “burying Confucian” and “Ban from hundred philosophers, venerate Confucianism”. As for the relationship between the emperor and the unity of the three religions, the harmony diagram of Zhu Jianshen, emperor of The Ming Dynasty, is a good example. Overall, the picture depicts a smile face image of maitreya, handheld beads series, is the typical symbol of Buddhism, but take the left side image rendering is a symbol of Taoist wore a crown of an old man, the right half are symbolic Confucian scholar with Confucianism wipes of Confucianism. This painting take “bonhomie” meaning, known in the inscription of Zhu Jianshen, he depicted Tao Yuanming, Taoist Lu Xiujing and monk Hui Yuan “three huxi laugh” story. So we can know his message is the thought of “three religions unity”, this also means the emperor status obviously higher than that of religious point of view.

Therefore, in Chinese religion, monarchical power dominates and religion serves politics, which is different from the balance between monarchical power and divine power in the Western countries.

4.3.2. Dragons

Dragon, as a special pattern in ancient China was monopolized by the emperor, the emperor in the history of the development process of gradually from the dragon, that makes the dragon which has symbolic meaning to be allowed to use in religion, but for the number of the dragon claws which used by religious has a clear regulation: dragon with five claws are still monopolized by the emperor. Religion can only be used under four claws dragon. This means superiors and inferiors, so from this point of view of the graphic example can prove that religion is under the bow to the monarch.

It can be concluded that the monumentality in Chinese religion not only includes the history of “three religions in one”, but also means the strengthening of monarchical power over religion essentially.

5. Conclusions

Through the analysis of the monumentality in religious art, this paper makes it clear that China and the Western countries are different in the carrier of the monumentality of religious art. In the history of western religious art, the monumentality is usually assumed by architecture and sculpture, while in Chinese religious art, the monumentality is assumed by graphic representation. In addition, monuments in religions not only include religious memorials, but also reflect the symbol of power, which is reflected in the constant balance between monarchical power and divine power in western religious art, while in China, it is reflected in the continuous centralization of power. However, monumentality has different characteristics in different historical stages and it is continuous. This historical extension of monumentality has many complex problems, which is worth further specific study.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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