

A Study on the Relevance between the 40 Statues of Arhats and 500 Statues of Arhats in the Lingyan Buddhist Temple at Changqing

Zhao-Xi ZENG*

Tourism Management Department, Jinan Vocational College, Jinan, 250103, China

13616418621@163.com

Keywords: 40 Statues of Arhats, 500 Statues of Arhats, Relevance Study.

Abstract. The 40 painted clay statues of arhats in Thousand Buddha Hall of the Lingyan Buddhist Temple at Changqing, Shandong Province were highly appraised by the Chinese celebrities. Meanwhile, the provenience of these statues were paid extensive attentions by both Chinese and overseas scholars. Omura Seigai (1868-1927) in Japan and some Chinese & overseas scholars hold the belief that these Statues correlate with the 500 statues of arhats first carved in the temple in the Song Dynasty.

By literature reviews and several field investigations for evidences, we finally concluded that some of the present statues in Thousand Buddha Hall were carved in the 3rd year of Zhiping Emperor in the Northern Song Dynasty (1066), and they were placed in Bozhou Hall, west of Thousand Buddha Hall. Later, the Hall was abandoned because of the destruction by the torrential floods. In the 15th year of Wanli Emperor in the Ming Dynasty (1587), the remaining 32 Statues were moved into Thousand Buddha Hall. And additional 8 statues were carved and placed there successively based on the Hall's spatial arrangements.

The original 500 statues of arhats in the Lingyan Buddhist Temple were completed in the 6th year of Xuanhe Emperor in the Northern Song Dynasty (1124). A Fengyilang (a civil official rank) named Qigu Song donated to sculpture them by craftsmen in Fujian Province. Although the two groups of arhats statues were carved not far from each other in the time of sculpture, they do not correlate with each other.

Introduction

The 40 painted clay statues in Lingyan Buddhist Temple at Changqing, Shandong Province broke the originally formalistic mode of the arhat statues. Each statue bears a strong resemblance to a real person, lively and vivid. Qichao Liang (1873-1929), the well-known scholar in the late Qing Dynasty, praised them as "the No.1 Famous Sculptures throughout the Country". The outstanding litterateur, poet and archaeologist Moruo Guo (1892-1978) wrote a poem for the statues, "Are the lifelike statues really for arhats? No, the inspiring paintings are for real persons! Each of the 40 Lingyan painted clay statues can be awakened to have a heart-to-heart talk with." China's prominent painter, fine arts educator Haisu Liu (1896-1994) even had the words of praise, "The famous painted statues in Lingyan, vivid and lifelike, are the No. 1 in the world."

As for the provenience of the 40 painted clay statues, Chinese Fine Arts History, written by Omura Seigai (1868-1927) in Japan, believed that those statues correlate with the 500 arhats firstly placed in the Lingyan Buddhist Temple. In his book he wrote, "The 500 statues of arhats in the Lingyan Buddhist Temple at Changqing, Shandong Province, were finished in the 6th year of Xuanhe Emperor in the Song Dynasty. The year before last, the Buddhist College told me, 'the statues in the Lingyan Buddhist Temple, only 40 remains.'" In addition to this, Outline of Chinese Fine Arts History written by Yu Li (1915-2010), Chronology of Chinese Fine Arts written by Baoshi Fu (1904-1965), Travel Notes to the Linyan Buddhist Temple written by Beiwen Xu (1924-2005), An Informal Essay for Historic Relics in the Linyan Buddhist Temple written by Zhewen Luo (1924-2012), all believed that the 500 statues of arhats were completed in the 6th year of Xuanhe Emperor in the Northern Song

Dynasty (1124). And the present 40 painted clay statues were the remaining ones of the 500 statues of arhats.

Are the existing 40 painted clay statues really correlate with the original 500 statues of arhats? We have doubts about it. In order to make clear the historical truth, we referred to a large number of documents literature, including archaeological literatures, and made several field investigations. Fortunately, we found the original records of the 500 statues of arhats on a stele that the two groups of statues don't correlate with each other.

Analysis of the Relevance from the Present Spatial Arrangements

Thousand Buddha Hall is the main building of the Lingyan Buddhist Temple. The name comes from the numerous little Buddha statues carved and set along the inside upper walls. The Hall, which lies behind Wuhua Hall, was built on the lofty podium at foot of the Lingyan Hill with acreage about 700 m². The hall was first built in the years of Zhenguan Emperor in the Tang Dynasty(627-649), and rebuilt in the years of Jiayou Emperor in the Song Dynasty (1056-1063) , Jiajing Emperor and Wanli Emperor in the Ming Dynasty (1522-1566, 1573-1620) respectively. The existing wood structure is built in the Ming Dynasty, but with architecture styles of the Tang and Song Dynasties: far-reaching single eave with hip roof, immense and magnificent Dougong (a system of brackets inserted between the top of a column and a crossbeam) under eaves, 8 stone pillars with exquisite carvings under the front eave.

The most popular with the tourists and the experts are the 40 painted clay statues in the hall. The statues are arranged in a line along the foot of the inner walls and sit on bricked pedestals of 0.8 meters high. Each measures 1.05 to 1.10 meters high from the top to the pedestal and covers an area of 2 m² respectively, which is huge in deed.

If those statues are the remaining part of the original 500 statues of arhats, The Arhats Hall will cover an area of more than 1000 m² with all the 500 arhats statues, which is larger than the acreage of Thousand Buddha Hall.

Generally Speaking, the Arhats Hall is a minor building of temples. If an Arhats Hall had been built in Lingyan Buddhist Temple in the history to enshrine and worship those 500 arhat statues, the hypothetical hall would have exceeded the main building, which was usually impossible.

Analysis of the Relevance from the Name Tags of the 40 Statues of Arhats

Beside each statue, there is a name tag nailed on the wall inscribing the name of the arhat. From the name tags counting from the west, we can see that No. 1, 7, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 24, 25, 26, 34, totaling 11 statues, are the eminent Chinese monks before and after the Song Dynasties. Especially the No. 34 statues, whose name is the National Master Ding Ding Yu Lin Xiu, is a eminent Chinese monk in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). He obeyed the summons of Shunzhi Emperor to enter the imperial palace in the 15th year of Shunzhi Emperor (1658), and publicized Buddha Dharma in Wanshan Hall of Zhongnanhai Compound.

If we have a careful comparison between the name tags and the statues, we can find some of the name tags are not in the right places. However, we can still draw two conclusions: Firstly, Not all of the 40 arhat statues were carved in the Song Dynasty; Secondly, those eminent Chinese monks shouldn't belong to the 500 Statues of Arhats. As to the 500 arhats, there are different versions in the Sutra. Generally speaking, they can be divided into two groups: 500 arhats before or after Buddha's nirvana. (Qingxiang Chen, 1982) When Buddha was alive, it was said that there were 500 Buddhist monks following him. After Buddha's nirvana, there were 4 grand councils in the Buddhist history. The senior arhats were appointed to take charge of the council each time. The first council (in the later period of the 5th century B.C.) was attended by 500 arhats excluding the eminent Chinese monks, the second (the later period of 4th century B.C.) 700, the third (in the middle period of the 3rd century B.C.) and the fourth (in the 1st century B.C.) 500. At those times, the Buddhism didn't spread into

China because we found nothing in the Buddhist sutras. The 500 arhats have nothing to do with the eminent Chinese monks. Therefore, the 11 statues of arhats with typical Chinese Dharma names mentioned above don't correlate with the 500 arhats.

Analysis of Relevance from the Stele “A Record of Donating 500 Arhats”

Now that the 11 statues don't correlate with the 500 arhats, how about the other statues? In the stele forest of the temple, we finally found a stele recording the story about the 500 arhats in the Lingyan Buddhist Temple. In the mid-Autumn of the 6th year of Xuanhe Emperor in the Song Dynasty (1124), the stone inscription named “A Record of Donating the 500 Arhats” was written by Qigu Song, Fengyilang (a civil official rank), and handwritten by Kebian Zhang, Chengjielang (a military officer rank). It said, “In the beginning of Zhenghe Emperor, I was an official in central Fujian Province and found the local Manual skills top the other provinces. And the sculpturing skill is particularly exquisite. So, all my salary, after the board expenses, is paid to the craftsmen (to sculpture the 500 arhats).....” And it said more, “Distinguished from inside of the statues, they are made of wood; and watched from outside of the statues, they are coated with a layer of gold.” The stele was ordered to carve by the Buddhist abbot Miaokong. It was set up in front of Shiwang Hall at that time. Now it has been moved to the little stele forest, east of the Heavenly King Hall. (See Fig. 1)



Figure 1. The stele named “A Record of Donating 500 Arhats”.

From the above records, we are clear that there were 500 statues of arhats in the Lingyan Buddhist Temple in the Song Dynasty. However, those statues were small wooden ones coated with a layer of gold on the surface. Obviously, they are not the existing huge painted clay statues of arhats. The sculpturing time of the 500 arhats recorded in the inscription is consistent with the time mentioned by Omura Seigai and other experts, but the texture and size are widely divergent. It further demonstrates that the 40 painted clay statues of arhats don't correlate with the original 500 statues of arhats.

Then, where after all are the 40 painted clay statues of arhats from? In 1982, when Jinan Municipal Cultural Relics Management Committee was repairing those statues of arhats, they found an inscription in the inner body of the no. 17 statue of arhat in the west of Thousand Buddha Hall: Carved by Zhong Gai, from Linyi Town Qi Prefecture, in June of the 3rd year of Zhiping Emperor. From the inscription we can infer that those statues of arhats were initially carved in 1066, by Zhong Gai and other craftsmen, the local people of Jinan. (See Fig. 2)



Figure 2. An inscription in the inner body of the no. 17 statue of arhat.

According to the existing steles named “A Record of Rebuilding Bozhou Hall with the Donation from Chan Master Shougong” and “The Name List of Donors in Charge of Painting the Statues” in the Yuan Dynasty, there were 32 statues of arhats in Bozhou Hall initially. They were painted in the 1st year of Zhihe Emperor (1328). Bozhou Hall was falling into disuse from the Ming Dynasty. In the 15th year of Wanli Emperor (1587) after Prince De had rebuilt Thousand Buddha Hall, the statues were moved to Thousand Buddha Hall. (Fusen Zhou, 1984). Later, the number of statues reached 40 by adding and repainting statues, and they are the painted clay statues of arhats we can see at present in Thousand Buddha Hall. According to the textual research of Jinan Municipal Cultural Relics Management Committee, after Thousand Buddha Hall had been rebuilt in the 15th year of Wanli Emperor (1587) in the Ming Dynasty, the inner walls were painted at least 3 times. And new epigraphs appeared on the painted walls. From the epigraphs we learned that the statues were painted in the 13th year of Tongzhi Emperor (1874) in the Qing Dynasty for the last time. The confusion of the name tags also appeared in this period.

Conclusion

From the references above, we can make the following conclusion: Most of the present statues in Thousand Buddha Hall were carved in the 3rd year of Zhiping Emperor in the Northern Song Dynasty (1066). They were placed in Bozhou Hall initially, west of Thousand Buddha Hall. They were painted in the 1st year of Zhihe Emperor in the Yuan Dynasty(1328). Later the Hall was abandoned. In the 15th year of Wanli Emperor in the Ming Dynasty (1587), the remaining 32 statues were moved into Thousand Buddha Hall. And additional 8 statues were carved and placed successively based on the Hall's spatial arrangements.

The original 500 statues of arhats in the Lingyan Buddhist Temple were completed in the 6th year of Xuanhe Emperor in the Northern Song Dynasty (1124). A Fengyilang (a civil official rank) named Qigu Song donated to carve them by craftsmen from Fujian Province. Those statues were made of wood. And a layer of gold was coated on their surfaces. Although the two groups of arhats statues were not far from each other in the time of sculpture, they don't correlate with each other.

Acknowledgement

In the process of writing, a large number of cultural and historical data have been checked back. And the selfless assistances have been received from my colleagues, friends and my family members. Special thanks to: Haiping Li, Vice-President of Jinan Vocational College; Dongwen Zhuang, Associate Professor of Linyi University; Aiwen Zhang, Vice General Manager of Shandong Youth Travel Service; Tingting Liu, tour guide of the Lingyan Buddhist Temple.

References

- [1] Omura Seigai (writer), Binhe Chen (translator), Chinese Fine Arts History, Taiwan Commercial Press, August 1965. In Chinese
- [2] Yu Li, Outline of Chinese Fine Arts History, Beijing: Beijing People's Fine Arts Publication House, 1957. In Chinese
- [3] Baoshi Fu, Chronology of Chinese Fine Arts, Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, March 1937. In Chinese
- [4] Beiwen Xu, Travel Notes to Lingyan Buddhist Temple, Dazhong Daily, November 19, 1954. In Chinese
- [5] Zhewen Luo, An Informal Essay for Historic Relics in the Lingyan Buddhist Temple, Cultural Relics Reference, 1957, No.5. In Chinese
- [6] Fuzen Zhou, the Sculpture Time and Related Issues about the Painted Clay Sculptures in Linyan Buddhist Temple at Changqing, Shandong Province, Cultural Relics, 1984, No.3. In Chinese
- [7] Jigao Hu, The Restoration of the Painted Clay Sculptures in Linyan Buddhist Temple at Changqing, Shandong Province, Archaeology, 1983, No.11. In Chinese
- [8] Qingxiang Chen, A Study on "500 Arhats' Images"[J], Huagang Buddhism Journal, 1981, No.5, p377-421. In Chinese