

# Aesthetics of Chaotic Times in Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang

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**Abstract:** *The Northern Wei Dynasty was a relatively chaotic dynasty during the Southern and Northern Dynasties. The influence of the long-term turmoil since the Sixteen Kingdoms of five ethnic groups has not been dissipated until today. The Northern Wei Dynasty Yang Xuanzhi's Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang (or in Pinyin Luoyang Qielan Ji) records the politics, characters, customs, geography and legends at that time based on the rise and fall of the Buddhist temple in Luoyang, the capital of the Northern Wei Dynasty. This article analyses the special aesthetic tendencies in troubled times through the aspects of religion, state power, and myths in the chaotic times in Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang.*

**Keywords:** *Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang; Religion; Power; Mythology; Aesthetics*

## 1. Introduction

Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang was written by Yang Xuanzhi of the Northern Wei Dynasty about the rise and fall of the Luoyang buddhist temples in eastern part of its capital. It actually recorded the politics, people, customs, geography and legends at that time. It has high literary and historical value. The Northern Wei Dynasty was a dynasty in the Southern and Northern Dynasties. This period was extremely chaotic. It took over the long-term turmoil since the Sixteen Kingdoms: the influence of the nomadic ethnic groups has not dissipated until today. In terms of customs, the clothing of the nomadic people was introduced into China, and the customs of diet, marriage, and burial changed; in terms of language, language of the nomadic groups led to the development of Chinese rhythms and dialect differences; culturally, Buddhist fanaticism became a trend; folk songs became the carrier of literature. In chaotic times, people had different minds and longed for peace, but in reality, people were forced to migrate with their homes desolate. This brought about a special aesthetic tendency in chaotic times.

## 2. Religious Fanaticism

History had told us that when people are oppressed and powerless to resist, they often have a vision for a better life in the afterlife. Religion is to use this beautiful fantasy to comfort them, numb them, and make them endure all the pain they encountered in reality. And rulers also used religion to tame the people, and religion must also rely on the power of rulers to carry out activities. As Shi Dao'an said in the Jin Dynasty, "If you don't obey the ruler, you will be difficult to do religious affairs" ("New Words of the World: Rewards"). It makes a footnote for why the Southern and Northern Dynasties became an era of religious fanaticism in the history.

The preface of Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang says: "By Yongjia era of Jin Dynasty, there were only forty-two temples. But up to the founding of Wei Dynasty, Luoyang was appointed as the capital, faithful believers, and Dharma teachings became more prosperous. Princes and nobles thoroughly abandoned the nomadic customs, and a large amount of wealth were donated to Buddhist temples. Therefore, temples and pagodas were built everywhere in the city, with an imitation of postures in the heaven or images in the mountains. The golden temples were as high as the astronomical observatory, and Buddhist halls were as grand as palaces. What's more, trees were dressed with silk and the lands were painted purple." He tried his best to describe the prosperity of Buddhist temples in the Northern Wei Dynasty, and various splendid temples became a scenario in the entire Northern and Southern Dynasties. However, "In the difficult time of Yongxi era, the emperor moved to Ye, and the monks and nuns of various temples also moved as entourage. In the fifth year of Wuding era, I revisited Luoyang and saw the city collapsed, the palace overturned, the temples in ashes, the

towers mound in ruins, the walls covered with wormwood, and the alleys full of thorns. The beasts burrowed in the desert steps, the mountain birds' nest in the palace trees." the country is ruined and the mountains and rivers are broken.

The trend of religious fanaticism in the Southern and Northern Dynasties can be seen from Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang, and there are three main points.

First, the prosperity splendor of the temples. In the introduction of Jingming Temple in Volume Three: Southern City, it said: "The temple is five hundred steps in all directions. Looking ahead to the Shaoshi of Songshan Mountain, it is inferior to the emperor's city. There are more than 1,000 rooms in the temple. The complex hall and multiple rooms are sparsely connected to each other. The cyan-blue platforms and purple pavilions are connected by floating roads. Although there are four seasons outside, there is no cold or heat inside." He made a detailed description of Jingming Temple. The establishment of the temple is so extravagant that "sometimes samanas from the Western Regions are seen here and sings about the Buddhist country."

Second, Buddhist worshipping of people, monks and nuns, and princes and nobles. In Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang, it is not difficult to find people's enthusiasm for Buddhism. For example, Volume one: Yongning Temple wrote, "In the second month of the third year of Yongxi era, the pagoda was burned, and the emperor climbed to Lingyuntai to look at the fire... He finally went away in tears due to grief. The people from all trades came to watch the fire and the grieving sound shook the capital." Fire of a Buddhist temple aroused the attention of the capital, and even "there are three monks who went to fire and die." And there is another reason for the prosperity of Buddhist temples. We can see everywhere in Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang that somebody donated his house as a temple.

Third, Buddhist features in architecture, painting and music. In Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang, all kinds of observatories, temples, Buddha statues and pagodas are extremely developed. As what was recorded in the first volume, there are one large- and ten medium-sized golden statues, as well as another three with embroidered beads, five with golden weavings and two in jade. The workmanship crowned in the world." As for music painting, it is reflected in temple murals and music. The style is "carved beams and powder walls", and all kinds of "Fan chanting music" are varied.

### 3. The Dislocation of Belief In Power

In the context of chaotic times, power became the primary target of disputes. In chaos, there were heroes, all of whom had the ideal of taking on the great cause. For the highest power, they could kill their families. Belief in power was a subject of aesthetics in chaotic times.

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, belief in power was sometimes mislocated, which was manifested in two ways.

(1) The literati lacked recognition of state power. The most provable example is the record in Volume 4: Fayun Temple: "Liu Baizhui, a native of Hedong, is good at making wine. During the hot summer time, he stores wine in jars exposed to the shining sun for at least ten days. After drinking the fragrant liquid, people keep drunken for almost a month. The ministers and nobles often went out for thousands of miles on errands, and the wine was presented as gifts to friends far away. The wine is called Heshang, or "wine for drinking on donkeys". In the middle of Yongxi era, Mao Hongbin, the prefect of South Qingzhou, who was bringing the wine with him, met thieves on his way. The thieves got drunk after drinking and were all captured. The wine got another name: wine for capture of thieves. A ranger says, 'what really worth frightening was not the sword, but the wine brewed by Bai Zhuichun." The disbelief of the people in state power is exaggeratedly reflected in the ranger's remarks. There are similar examples in Volume 4, as sayings like "Knights on fast horses are not so good as old women blowing flute". The aesthetic feature of power belief is that power in chaotic times is not recognized.

(2) The absence and replacement of state power. We all know that the highest form of state power is the right to rule. In the Northern and Southern Dynasties, the regimes were overthrown frequently, and the ruling power sometimes failed. When the head of a country died or was abolished, the ruling power was immediately handed over to the next successor. When the successor does not take the responsibility, the ruling power will be lost, and "a country cannot be without a master for a day", so the power is replaced by emperor's maternal relatives or close ministers. The power of the state actually forms a symbolic character, and the ruling power is generally distributed among the local governors.

#### 4. The Establishment of the Myth of Troubled Times

Aesthetics in chaotic times has its own unique aesthetic category, one of which is the establishment of mythology. In the Northern and Southern Dynasties period, the prosperity of religion made it no longer difficult to establish myths in the chaotic times. Because of the interweaving of belief in nothingness and nothingness of belief, mythology was formed.

The myths in Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang are mainly in Volume 5: North of the City, about the legends of foreign Buddhism, not typical of the myths of the chaotic times. We believe that there are two types of myths in chaotic times: myth of war and anecdotes. They are scattered in Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang.

The myth of war, as stated in Volume 4: Fayun Temple: "Tian Sengchao is good at blowing flute, and can sing majestic songs. Cui Yanbo, the general of the expedition to the west, loves him very much. In the last years of Zhengguang era, Gaoping was lost, and the rebels led by Moqi Guinu rampaged in Jingqi areas. The Court was busy for oppression and ordered Yanbo to deal with the rebellion with 50,000 soldiers. Yanbo went to Zhangfang Bridge in the west of Luoyang City, which is the Sunset Pavilion of the Han Dynasty. The chariots and cavalry are in a row. Yanbo is in front of him with a high crown and a long sword, and Sengchao plays the hero's flute in the back. Those who hear it become brave men. For more than 20 years, the entire city has not been attacked, and the battle has not been overturned, so the court sent him with all his heart. Every time Yanbo came to the battle, he often made Sengchao play music for soldiers, and all the men in armor were enthusiastic. Yanbo entered the battle alone, as if no one was around. In two years, victories came one after another. The head of the rebel ordered archers to kill Sengchao by arrow. Yanbo grieved and mourned. Later Yanbo was caught by the random arrows and died in the army. So the 50,000-soldier division was scattered for a while."

Tian Sengchao is very good at playing music, which can make "cowards become brave", and can also make "serial successes". Music has been superb here. This is a deified blower. Cui Yanbo, the general, "was renowned for his courage and reputation. During last twenty years, he always won." This is another image of the "God of War" that has been deified; but his death made the division lose. The myth of war is presented like this in Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang, and the gods are hidden in the text.

Anecdotes, such as "Hair Grows on Buddha Statues", "Buddha's sweat", "Fox Girl", and "Nightmare" that can be seen everywhere in the book. Strictly speaking, they do not have the characteristics required by mythology. However, some stories already have the framework of mythology. Let us call this kind of grotesque mythology. They were popular in the Northern and Southern Dynasties. In fact, it is influenced by religion, because they are evolved in Buddhist temples, and most of them involve gods and Buddhas. For example, Volume 2: Jingning Temple writes: "In the market area of Xiaoyi Block, there are four butchers, Liu Hu and his three brothers. In Yong'an era, the pig begs for life when Hu is about to butcher and the sound is heard by neighbours. The neighbors said that the Hu brothers fought each other and came to watch, and found it is the pig. Hu immediately donated the house as Guijue Temple, and the whole family were converted to Buddhism. In the first year of Putai, the golden statue of this temple was full of hair and eyebrows. Wei Jijing, a minister, said to people: 'this phenomenon happened during Zhang Tianxi's reign, and his regime was overthrown. This is a symptom of inauspicity.' in the next year, the emperor was abolished and died. "Pig's beg for life" and "golden images growing hair" are accidental things, but after adding man-made elements, we find that this is the frame of mythology: strange signs, prophecies-fulfillment.

From the brief description of the above three points, we have roughly sorted out the categories of aesthetics in troubled times: cultural psychology (religion), political psychology (power), and folk aesthetics (myth). Of course, the aesthetics of chaotic times cannot have and only have these three aspects.

#### 5. Conclusion

The aesthetics of the troubled times reflected in Notes of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang was obviously intertwined with the political situation at that time. It has to be said that the ideology of aesthetics also appeared. Aesthetics in troubled times is a special aesthetics that expresses people's thoughts and emotions. In other words, it is still the same as other aesthetics, it is the explicit intuition of human's essential power.

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