
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Three Rabbits with Common Ears: The Trajectory of Dunhuang Murals.

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ABSTRACT

Over the course of thousands of years, the weathered murals have once again become apparent. Among them, the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” caisson pattern is a unique decorative element in Dunhuang murals, depicting the unique scene of “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears”. Therefore, the symbolism behind it has attracted academic attention. This article introduces the development history and cultural symbols of “caisson”, the symbolism of the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” pattern, and its manifestation as a “rail object paradigm”. Through comprehensive literature research and comparative analysis of other themes, this article aims to reveal that the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” caisson represents family unity, prosperity, and fertility prayers, providing a new perspective for further understanding the cultural connotation and artistic expression of Dunhuang murals.

KEYWORDS

'Three Rabbits with Shared Ears' zaojing; Dunhuang murals; symbolic meaning; guiding the world through virtue.

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1. Introduction

Dunhuang murals, as treasures in ancient Chinese art, have always been of great concern to the academic community for their rich themes and unique artistic expressions. Among them, the “Three Rabbits Shared Ears” caisson, as a unique decorative element, has rich forms and meanings and occupies an important position in Dunhuang murals. However, so far, research on the artistic characteristics, cultural symbols, and historical background carried by the “Three Rabbits with Ears” caisson has been limited. Therefore, an in-depth exploration of the connotation and significance of the “Three Rabbits with Ears” caisson not only helps to enhance the understanding of Dunhuang murals but also helps to reveal the unique charm of Dunhuang culture. In this context, this study provides an in-depth interpretation of the artistic characteristics of the “Three Rabbits with Common Ears” caisson in order to reveal its profound connotations and further explore the historical and cultural background related to it. At the same time, this study will also combine the “Three Rabbits with Common Ears” caisson with the concept of the Trajectory Paradigm to explore the expression and significance of the two in Dunhuang murals. Firstly, a detailed interpretation of the “Three Rabbits with Common Ears” caisson Enriched the research content of Dunhuang culture. Secondly, studying the combination of the “Three Rabbits Sharing the Ear” caisson and the “Trajectory Model World” ideology not only reveals the ideological connotations behind Dunhuang mural works from a macro perspective but also provides a new way of thinking about the relationship between Dunhuang culture and ancient Chinese civilization. Finally, the innovation of this study lies in the in-depth study and exploration of the “Three Rabbits in Ears” diatom well and the “Trajectory Paradise” idea, which is still a rare research perspective and method. For academic research, there is a certain breakthrough. In the following chapters, this article will comprehensively and deeply reveal the unique charm of the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” caisson in Dunhuang murals.

2. Interpretation of the Patterns of “Diaoyi” and “Three Rabbits Sharing the Ears”

2.1 Analysis of the Development History and Cultural Symbols of “Diaoyi”

The caisson is the most important part of the interior decoration of ancient Chinese traditional buildings, the essence of the interior decoration of classical buildings, and plays an important role in many decorations.

The “ceiling” that protrudes upwards in the middle to form a certain space and has a decorative effect, which was called a caisson by ancient people. As for the ceiling, it is a building component that covers the top of the room. It not only has a decorative effect, but it can also keep the indoor space warm in winter and cool in summer, prevent dust from falling from above, and serve other purposes (Zong & Liu, 2023).

From a cultural symbolic perspective, the caisson embodies the solemnity, grandeur, and luxury of Chinese classical architecture. The ancients had a deep description of the decoration of seaweed wells. Zhang Heng, a famous astronomer and writer of the Eastern Han Dynasty, wrote in his “Ode to the Western Capital”: “The long beam of the majestic rainbow is connected by a knot of apples, and the eggplant is poured into the seaweed well. It is adorned with red flowers for hunting, adorned with flower petals and jade pendants, and flows like Wei Ye.”. The magnificence and solemnity of the caisson in ancient architecture can be seen.

Regarding the development history of artificial intelligence wells, we cannot simply believe that ancient Chinese architecture only set up artificial intelligence wells for decoration. According to the “Customs and Customs”, “today's palace is made into a courtyard, and the well is like a bundle of wells; algae and objects in the water are all taken to suppress fires.”. Due to the fact that many ancient Chinese buildings are made of wooden structures, they are prone to fires. The original intention of setting up caissons was to avoid fires as much as possible. However, many skilled craftsmen gradually discovered the decorative effects contained in them, resulting in their decorative functions far exceeding their fire prevention functions and even losing their fire prevention functions.

Diaoyi is a treasure of ancient Chinese art, whether used as a decorative element or for other purposes, reflecting the development of society at that time, indicating people's yearning for harmony, unity, and prosperity, and also showcasing the outstanding creativity and unique aesthetic views of ancient Chinese art.

2.2 Detailed Interpretation of the Pattern of the “Three Rabbits Sharing the Ears” Algal Well

The “Three Rabbits with Common Ears” caisson is a unique decorative element in Dunhuang murals, and its form and meaning have attracted academic attention. Dunhuang murals are treasures of ancient Chinese art, and their rich and diverse patterns and mysterious symbols have always been of great concern. Deeply interpret the legend and literature of Rabbits in traditional culture and explore the important position and profound influence of the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” caisson pattern.

The pattern of “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” first appeared in Cave 407 of the Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang (Si & Wang, 2015). The pattern is composed of Three Rabbits. The Rabbits are connected by Ears to form a round caisson. There are eight lotus flowers in the caisson, and there are flying clouds of different shapes around the caisson. The Rabbits in the lotus seem to be chasing and running towards each other, and the still patterns seem to move and run. This pattern gives people a mysterious and beautiful feeling. In terms of artistic composition, ‘Three Rabbits Sharing Ears’ adopts a symmetrical layout, giving people a harmonious feeling. (Xie, 2010)

In traditional Chinese culture, there are various meanings for Rabbits, such as the bronze rabbit statue from the Western Zhou Dynasty, the legend of the white rabbit pounding medicine, the seal of the rabbit hand dragon statue from the Five Dynasties period, and so on. Rabbits have represented auspiciousness since ancient times. In Volume 2 of “Guiqian Zhi”, Zhao Yilu's poem “On the Song Yang Returning to the Hidden” is quoted. The Three Rabbit Caves of Yaoyao Yunshan and the Drifting Wind Tree Nest of a Dove are metaphors for various ways to avoid disasters, indicating the ancient people's love for Rabbits.

The Ears are the most vulnerable part of Rabbits, and they share their Ears with each other, symbolizing the unity and harmony of the family. Rabbits are connected together through their Ears, indicating a close connection and interdependence among family members. Rabbits, as highly reproductive animals, represent vitality and prosperity. The emergence of the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” caisson expresses people's prayers for family reproduction and fertility.

The significance of family unity, reproduction, and reproduction conveyed by the “Three Rabbits with Ears” caisson is not only an expression of the society at that time but also a universal pursuit of human civilization.

2.3 The Exchange and Integration of Eastern and Western Cultures of ‘Three Rabbits and Ears’

The emergence of the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” caisson is closely related to the historical and cultural background of that time. Dunhuang is an important node on the Silk Road, attracting cultural exchange and integration from both the East and the West’

The emergence of the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” diatom well can be seen as a cultural phenomenon in the context of social development at that time. In the Tang Dynasty, China’s socio-economic prosperity and cultural and artistic peak were also reached. Although the “Three Rabbits Shared Ear Algae Well” in Dunhuang murals is currently the earliest known pattern of the Three Rabbits Sharing Ears, the pattern of the Three Rabbits may not have originated from the Mogao Caves. We can confirm that the “Three Rabbits with Ears” image appears not only in Mogao Caves and some Buddhist decorations, but also in Islamic and Christian regions, and even in the southwestern region of England. For example, in Central Asia and other regions, this pattern appears in glass and ceramics, respectively. Painted pottery and textiles in Syria. In the European continent, the Three Rabbits Sharing ears diagram appears in Islamic metal product patterns, metal casting molds, building carvings, and so on. Appearing in the form of roof reliefs in many churches. The exchange and inclusiveness between different religions and cultures are the biggest characteristics of the Silk Road region.

3. The Relationship and Influence of “Three Rabbits Shared Ears” and “Trajectory Paradise”

3.1 The Expression of “Trajectory and Verse” in Dunhuang Murals

“The concept of ‘the model of things’ is an important concept in traditional Chinese culture. According to the preface of Yan’s teachings, ‘The Wei and Jin dynasties had already established various schools of thought, emphasizing the importance of things and presenting them in a standardized manner. It is like building a house under a house and putting Ears on a bed. Therefore, I am not daring to follow the model of things. ‘From this, it can be seen that’ the model of things’ refers to the norms of things and the role models of the world, which means that people should do things according to corresponding rules and standards.” Play a role model(Chen, 2019)

Three Rabbits are running in the same direction, their Ears always connected, never catching up with each other but always touching each other. The Three Rabbit Diagram exists not only in Buddhism but also in various religions around the world. These Three Rabbits represent “past life”, “present life”, and “future life”. Just like Three rabbit Ears touching each other, they are interconnected with the past, present, and future lives, in line with the theories of “karma”, “causal cycle”, and “life and death cycle”, reflecting the development laws of all things. The rabbit also symbolizes the spirit of faithfulness and self sacrifice of the savior. In Buddhist legend, in his previous life, Shakyamuni’s monastic practice interrupted cooking in the forest. In an endangered moment, the rabbit jumped into the fire and became food, saving the life of the Buddha. In gratitude for the spirit of sacrifice of the Rabbits, the Buddha adopted a vegetarian diet from then on’ As a decorative element in Dunhuang murals, the “Three Rabbits Shared Ears” caisson conveys the values of the “Trajectory Paradise” through its image and posture, emphasizing the development laws and exemplary spirit between humans and nature, as well as between humans, whether from the development laws contained in the Three rabbit patterns or the faithful and selfless spirit of the Rabbits.

The creation of Dunhuang murals spanned approximately the 5th to 10th centuries, which was a period of rapid development in ancient Chinese culture. In this context, the emergence of the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” caisson can be seen as a special form of expression in the social and cultural context of that time. It is not only a decorative element but also carries people’s thinking and pursuit of moral ethics, social order, and interpersonal relationships at that time(Chen, 2018)

3.2 A New Understanding of “Three Rabbits Shared Ears” in the Context of “Trajectory Paradise”

As a unique decorative element in Dunhuang murals, the “Three Rabbits Shared Ears” caisson has attracted much attention from the academic community in terms of its form and meaning. Through an in-depth analysis of the artistic characteristics, cultural symbols, and historical background of the “Three Rabbits Shared Ears” caisson, the profound connotation of this decorative element can be revealed.

Firstly, from the perspective of artistic characteristics, the shape of the “Three Rabbits Shared Ears” caisson demonstrates a delicate carving technique and unique pattern design. The Three Rabbits in the well are tightly connected, with their Ears crossed, forming a complete circle. This form not only has artistic beauty but also gives people a sense of harmony and unity. At the same time, other decorative elements such as flowers and cloud patterns are also integrated into the “Three Rabbits Shared Ears” caisson, adding to the overall decorative effect.

Secondly, from the perspective of cultural symbolism, the meaning of the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” caisson is rich. Rabbits are endowed with various meanings in traditional Chinese culture, such as reproduction, harmony, and auspiciousness. The Three Rabbits in the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” well are closely connected, with their Ears crossed, forming a complete circle, symbolizing the harmonious unity of the Three individuals. This symbolic significance is consistent with the pursuit of harmony and unity in family, society, and country in traditional Chinese culture.

From the perspective of the historical background, the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” caisson contains the meaning of “the world of trajectories” “Trajectory as a model” is an ancient term that means “taking things as a model and the world as a track”, which is a

requirement for moral norms and behaviors in traditional culture. The form and symbolism of the “Three Rabbits Shared Ears” caisson are in line with the concept of “Trajectory and Model World”, reflecting the values of ancient people's pursuit of moral norms and moral behavior.

The “Three Rabbits with Ears” diatom well symbolizes the significance of the “Trajectory of the World”. Through in-depth research on the artistic characteristics, cultural symbols, and historical background of the “Three Rabbits with Ears” caisson, we can better understand the cultural connotation and artistic expression of Dunhuang murals. This study provides a new perspective for exploring the artistic value and cultural significance of Dunhuang murals and also makes important contributions to our better inheritance and promotion of traditional Chinese culture.

4. Epilogue

The millennium old desert sandstorms have not buried the splendid Dunhuang murals. Through in-depth investigation and interpretation of the “Three Rabbits Sharing Ears” caisson in Dunhuang murals, we have found that the caisson is not only used for decoration but also designed to avoid fires, keep indoor warm in winter and cool in summer, and prevent dust from falling from above. Based on literature research, this article believes that the “Three Rabbits Shared Ears” caisson symbolizes the meaning of “the world of things”. The symbolism of the rabbit is rich. Starting from the spiritual quality of the rabbit, ancient Chinese mythology and legends emphasize the development of laws and exemplary spirits between humans and nature and between humans. The Three Rabbits are closely connected, and the intersecting part of their Ears will form a complete circle, reflecting the ancient people's concept of a round sky and a round place; a complete circle also symbolizes the harmony and unity of Three individuals, which is a requirement for moral norms and behavior in traditional culture. The exchange and integration of Eastern and Western cultures have promoted the dissemination of the Three rabbit ear pattern. It is not only a decorative element but also carries people's thoughts and pursuits on moral theory, social order, and interpersonal relationships at that time. This study provides a new perspective for a deeper understanding of the cultural connotations and artistic expression of Dunhuang murals.

There are still some shortcomings in this article, and the interpretation of the artistic characteristics and cultural symbols of the “Three Rabbits and Ears” caisson needs to be further expanded and deepened. Although this study has made some explorations in analyzing the form and meaning of the “Three Rabbits and Ears” caisson, there are still some deeper questions that need to be explored and answered, such as whether the pattern of the “Three Rabbits and Ears” is related to the Eight Trigrams, and whether it is related to the idea of the Trajectory Paradise, The performance in Dunhuang murals and the correlation with the Three Rabbits Common Ears Algae Well still need to be further studied. The exploration of the concept of the model of things in this article has not yet reached a comprehensive and in-depth level, and further argumentation and exploration are needed.

In future research, we can first continue to provide a more detailed interpretation of the artistic characteristics of the Three Rabbit Ear Digging Well, further revealing its cultural symbolism. Secondly, we need to have a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of the Trajectory Paradise, studying its manifestation in family traditions and teachings, and interpreting traditional Chinese culture at a deeper level, and deeply linking it with the Three Rabbit Ear Digging Well. In addition, from a broader perspective, we can explore the development of the Three Rabbit Ear Algae Well in various dynasties of Dunhuang murals, as well as the research and exploration of Dunhuang scripture caves. This can further expand the research field of Dunhuang murals and enrich the connotation of Dunhuang culture. We hope that this study can provide useful references for the protection and research of Dunhuang murals, promote the inheritance and development of Dunhuang culture, and for future researchers and enthusiasts. There are still many issues that need further exploration and research, and we look forward to more scholars joining the study of Dunhuang murals to jointly explore more treasures.

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