

A Study on the Form and Aesthetics of Confucian Konglin Stone Carvings

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Abstract: Confucianism is a Confucian shrine that combines multiple values of culture, religion and art. The study of Confucianism's Konglin concerns many important issues of traditional Chinese culture and art. The reinterpretation of the cultural value of the stone inscriptions in Confucianism today is the choice of the times for the dissemination of Confucianism and an important path for the world to understand Chinese culture and ethics. Along with the rise of Confucianism fever, the study of Confucian culture has attracted widespread academic attention, but most of the existing results are case studies of the stone carvings in Konglin, and cannot fully interpret the cultural implications of the stone carvings in Konglin. Based on this, the author takes the Konglin stone inscriptions as the main object of study, analyses their external shape and explores their intrinsic aesthetic value, and takes an artistic and philosophical view of the inner connection between Confucianism and calligraphy in order to provide useful reference for the dissemination of Confucian culture.

1. Introduction

Chinese civilisation has a long history and a rich cultural heritage. In the course of history, Chinese culture has developed distinctive regional cultures. The most influential of these is the school of Confucianism founded by Confucius. The Confucian Grove in Qufu is not only a World Heritage Site, but also the birthplace of Confucius' Confucian culture. "The Confucius Mansion, Confucius Grove and Confucius Temple are the largest complex of buildings with oriental architectural colours and grunge decorations that combine a mansion, temple and cemetery for the worship of

Confucius and his descendants in China, and a testimony to this tradition of promoting Confucian culture in honour of Confucius through the ages." [1] "The Confucius Forest, also known as the Forest of the Sacred, is the exclusive burial ground of Confucius and his clan, and is one of the largest, oldest and best preserved clan burial complex mausoleums in the world. For this reason, it is known as the "First Forest in the World"." [2] The size of the Confucius Forest is not only the vast area of more than 3,800 acres, but also the number of inscriptions, with 5,572 inscriptions currently in the collection. "In the Confucius Forest, which is covered by ten thousand trees, the inscriptions are like a forest and the stone instruments are in groups. In addition to some of the Han inscriptions left in the Confucius Temple, tombstones inscribed by famous calligraphers such as Li Dongyang, Weng Fanggang and He Shaoji still exist in the forest. Therefore, the Confucian Forest is not only a calligraphic monument forest, but also a cultural sanctuary that combines culture, religion and the very high value of calligraphic art." [3]

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However, from the analysis of the existing results, most of them are case studies of the stone inscriptions of Confucius Grove, which cannot fully interpret the cultural implications of the stone inscriptions of Confucius Grove. Based on this, the author takes the Konglin stone carvings as the main research object, analyses their external shape and explores their intrinsic aesthetic value, in order to provide useful reference for the development of the ecology of Confucian culture.

2. Analysis of the stylistic art of the stone carvings of Konglin

2.1. An analysis of the shape of the Konglin carvings

We will discuss the art of Konglin carving in a logical way, from the surface to the inside. First of all, we will analyse the Konglin carvings in terms of their visual impact. The stone carvings of Konglin are divided into three main categories: round carvings, relief carvings and translucent carvings. The stone carvings of Konglin follow a strict hierarchical concept in terms of production and use. This is true of all the stone carvings of the tombs of the Confucius Forest, from the stone doorways of the Confucius Forest to the stone carvings of the tombs of the Confucius Forest. The most exquisite carving of all is that of the stone gate pagoda of the Confucius Forest (see Fig. 1). The entire construction of the Konglin pagoda is described as a 'gate of art'. The carving is superb, with the eyes of the beast full of life, and the intertwining ribbons of the Qilin embroidery balls, which are carved through

the stone, giving the whole sculpture the charm of the 'Wu belt in the wind'. The dragon and phoenix hovering over the pillars are even more evocative, using a combination of relief and translucent carving to blend the dragon and phoenix into the pillars. The design of the pagoda not only adds a sense of vitality to the whole place, but also highlights the majesty of the ancient temple of Confucius.

Passing through the stone pagoda, you formally enter the Confucius Forest. What you see before you are the solemn stone sculptures on either side of the tomb. The stone sculptures are set in strict accordance with the hierarchy in terms of shape and number, in keeping with the ritual system advocated by Confucius. The Confucius tombstone is the most majestic in the Confucian Forest. "In front of the tomb is a large stele inscribed with the words 'Tomb of King Wen Xuan of the Greatest Sage' in small seal script, and in front of the stele are a stone offering case, a stone tripod, a stone wine pond, a stone worship platform and a brick wall with flower latticework. The stone case and censer were carved in the Ming dynasty, with meticulous workmanship and an ancient atmosphere." [4] From the tombstones of Confucius to the tombstones and accompanying stone carvings of Confucius' direct lineage, the Ming and Qing dynasties are particularly exquisite in terms of the number and carving techniques used in the carvings of the tombs of the diffractors. This is evidenced by the stone figures and horses beside the tomb of the Qing dynasty's 'Grand Duke of Diffraction' in Figure 1. The two stone figures are more than three metres tall and are dressed in Chinese official's clothes, both of which are of the first rank. The sleeves of the two stone figures are carved in the shape of an 'S' arc, which is very flowing. The two stone figures look at each other, giving a sense of awe. The stone horses on either side are carved in the round, a simple and atmospheric technique that makes the horses slightly more powerful; the saddles and stirrups on either side are carved in shallow relief, a more delicate and subtle style. In addition, the stone sheep and tigers are carved in the round next to the horses, giving them a three-dimensional feel. All of these add to the majesty of the Confucius Grove and add to its serenity.

The above analysis of the art of stone carving at Konglin shows that it has a special beauty of oriental art, and also contains a rich sense of Confucian ethics and propriety. On the one hand, the special 'courtesy' of Confucius' Confucian status left a legacy of exquisite stone carvings for future generations, as imperial power was strengthened during the Ming and Qing dynasties. On the other hand, the exquisite Confucian stone carvings represented the development of Chinese craftsmanship and shone brightly in the world of cultural and artistic exchange.

2.2. The art of modelling inscriptions in the Confucian Forest

The tombstones in the Confucius Grove have a special and prominent place in the mausoleum. Let us next analyse the stylistic art of the Konglin inscriptions. Confucius Grove inscriptions are divided into stele and jie in terms of their

appearance. A square head is a stele and a round head is a jie. "The Book of Rites. Sandalwood" records that the office is a rich monument, and the three families regard the Huan pillar. This means a large stele, made of a huge wood, cut into a rectangular body, with a round hole in the middle. The structure of the stele is divided into the head, the body and the pedestal of the stele." [5] The stele and jie not only illustrate the identity of the tomb owner, but also sing praises to his life. The standing of monuments and tablets in the Confucian Grove also followed the same strict rituals. Thus, behind every stele in the Confucian Grove are some prestigious members of the Confucian clan.

Since before and after the ban on monuments by Emperor Wu of Cao Wei, the Confucian Forest has been relatively free to erect monuments, although the custom of erecting monuments in the Eastern Han Dynasty was strictly adhered to. It was not until the Sui dynasty that official inscriptions were introduced: "When a monument is erected above the third rank, the head of a chi dragon

and the head of a tortoise shall fall, and the height of the fall shall be no more than nine feet. Above the fifth rank, a monument with a chi dragon head and a tortoise fall, with a height of no more than four feet on the fall, and a seventh rank monument with a four-foot height and a square fall with a kyu head." [6] This ritual has been strictly adhered to since then in the erection of the Confucius Grove inscriptions. This is evidenced by the more than 5,000 inscriptions of different shapes and scales in Confucius Grove. In our research we found that the rank of the Confucian descendants was directly proportional to the degree of refinement of the inscriptions. In essence, the higher the rank, the more decorative the inscriptions. For example, the tombstone of the seventy-third generation of Confucius, the Duke of Diffraction, with its chi dragon head motif and large regular script, is full of the atmosphere of a temple. So, on the one hand, Confucius and his descendants can be seen to be honoured and distinguished by the decoration of the inscriptions and scales; on the other hand, the Confucian clan followed a strict ritual system in the erection of the inscriptions, a ritual system from clan to patriarchal law, which reinforced the ethical link between 'family' and 'state'. In addition, the Confucius Forest inscriptions, in addition to their text, are also of a very high quality.

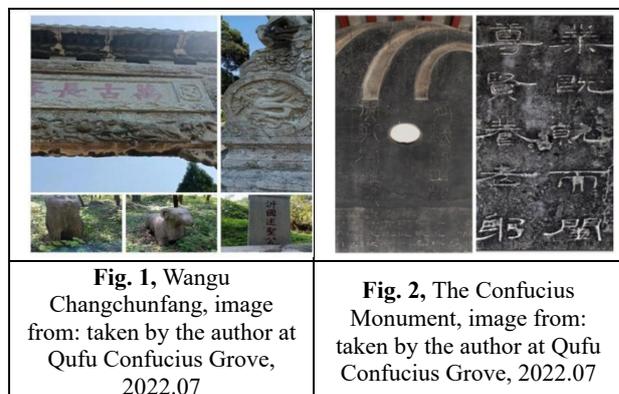


Fig. 1, Wangu Changchunfang, image from: taken by the author at Qufu Confucius Grove, 2022.07

Fig. 2, The Confucius Monument, image from: taken by the author at Qufu Confucius Grove, 2022.07

In addition to the textual decoration of the Confucius Grove inscriptions, the frontispiece is also beautifully

shaped. The setting of the tablet also follows the design concept of ritual. We find that the Confucius tablet is carved in relief with a dragon motif, which is exquisitely crafted and beautifully shaped. This is followed by the frontispieces of successive generations of the Diffractors, which are also carved in relief with a dragon motif. In comparing the frontispieces of Confucius monuments, we found that the frontispieces of both the Ming and Qing dynasties were dominated by a square 'two dragons playing with a pearl' carving in relief. The difference lies in the fullness of the design and the radial shape of the dragon pearl in the Ming dynasty, whereas in the Qing dynasty the two dragons are entwined in a more three-dimensional manner. In terms of carving, the Qing dynasty is more exquisite than the Ming dynasty. This suggests that not only was the craft industry of the Qing dynasty during the Kang-Qian period highly skilled, but the national economy was also stronger.

The analysis of the Konglin inscriptions and stone carvings shows that, on the one hand, the Konglin inscriptions are superb and rich in connotation, reflecting the development of the craft industry in the Ming and Qing dynasties. On the other hand, the rituals of the Konglin inscriptions allow for the natural integration of 'family' and 'state'.

3. Exploring the aesthetic value of the stone carvings of Konglin

We have summarised the shape and art of the Confucius Grove above and learnt that its spatial composition is rich in aesthetic value. What is the aesthetic value of the Konglin carvings? The following article will delve into the aesthetic value of the Konglin carvings.

"Chinese aesthetics is a science of perception that highlights perceptual cognition in reference to Western aesthetics. It is a philosophy of art that is concerned with the ontology of art, value theory and the laws of creation, and focuses on the characteristics of spirituality, moral cultivation and character algae. The main manifestation is the aesthetic orientation from the surface to the inside, starting with the intuitive beauty of form, followed by the rational beauty of content, and finally the spiritual beauty of humanity. Therefore, in Chinese aesthetic consciousness, the function of beauty goes beyond the realm of 'joy' and emphasises the two different directions of 'truth' and 'goodness'. The 'truth' spoken of here contains the true feelings of human beings, the truth of art, and so on. The 'goodness' spoken of here implies goodness of heart, goodness of virtue, etc." [7] "Aesthetic ontology studies the aesthetic activities of human beings, to answer the nature, occurrence mechanism and value of aesthetic activities. This paper uses the classical Chinese view of aesthetics to explore the 'imagery' of the stone carvings in Konglin. The essence of 'imagery' is 'elephant', and 'elephant' is both the essence of imagery and the essence of beauty, without which there is no beauty. The emphasis on 'elephant' in classical Chinese aesthetics can be traced back to the creation of Chinese characters, which are 'elephants'." [8]

3.1. The beauty of diverse forms of writing

Confucius Grove has the reputation of being a forest of monuments. It has witnessed the evolution of calligraphy throughout its two thousand years of Confucian heritage. The stone inscriptions throughout the Forest have lasted for a thousand years, and the beauty of the continuity of the script can be seen in the evolution of the calligraphic style from the front of the tablet to the face of the tablet. For example, in Figure 2, the Confucius Stele (164), with its rounded head and pierced halo, is inscribed in seal script 'Stele of Confucius, Captain of Taishan, Han Dynasty'. The stele's official script is full of limbs, with long fronds and hidden intentions. In addition to its great calligraphic value, the Kong Zu stele is also of great value in terms of its form, as it has a forehead and a title, which is the only one of its kind on a Han stele, and is a precedent for the monument system of the Sui and Tang dynasties." [9] This 'ancient quality and modern beauty' design has influenced the shape of tombstones throughout the ages. As a result, Konglin's stone carvings have the beauty of ancient and modern calligraphy. The calligraphic style of the different eras can be perceived as a continuation of the textual aesthetic. There are many inscriptions of this style in the Confucius Grove, either inscribed in regular script or in seal script. The difference in style of writing not only enhances the beauty of the monument body, but also coalesces the solemn temple atmosphere of the tomb. We therefore summarise the beauty of the text on the Confucius Grove inscriptions as follows.

3.1.1. 'The beauty of the middle solidity of the lines of the inscriptions'.

The Confucius Grove inscriptions are full of tension within the book. This is because the lines are medium-solid and calm, written with a medium-edged brush, and the lines are strong and powerful. The full, rounded lines are like the shape of an 'Ω', with an outward pull. Like a folded forked strand, the cone draws sand, giving a sense of mid-substantial beauty. The centre of gravity of the text is smooth and the chapter composition is orderly. For example, the foreheads of the Qing dynasty Konglin inscriptions are mostly in seal script, while the content is mostly in regular Yan script, giving a visual tension and presenting a square, broad and positive atmosphere.

3.1.2. "The neat beauty of the chapters".

The chapter setting of the Confucius Grove inscriptions reveals its neatness. The centre of gravity of each line is in a straight line, like the formation of a soldier, majestic and tidy. For example, the tombstone of the 74th generation of Confucius, Duke Yansheng, has the two characters 'Huang Qing' on the forehead, the Yan script in the main text, and the smaller characters in the inscription. It is like a general on parade marching in formation. It gives a sense of neatness and majesty.

3.1.3. The beauty of the continuity of the ancient and modern calligraphic styles.

The Confucius Grove inscriptions range from the seal script of the Han Dynasty to the regular script of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, as if recreating the evolution of Chinese writing. The calligraphic styles of the different inscriptions all represent the calligraphic styles popular in Chinese society at the time. The most classic of all is the clerical style of the Confucius Grove inscriptions from the two Han dynasties, which is either ancient and majestic, or beautiful and colourful, together with the quaint seal script inscriptions, allowing people to admire the tombstones and feel the wireless continuation of the life of Chinese characters.

3.2. The beauty of the reproduction of the shape and variety

The beauty of Confucius' writing is naturally inseparable from the carrier of the 'elephant', which is the stone inscriptions of Confucius' forest. The stone carvings in Konglin are of various shapes and forms, and have the beauty of reproduction. From the combination of stone doorways to the single column of stone beasts, each group of shapes is a cohesive imitation of the designer's natural creative philosophy. In other words, the designer has processed the original stone in accordance with the concept of beauty, and through the medium of stone the objective 'object' is truly presented in the work of art, thus pursuing the aesthetic spirit of 'the unity of heaven and man'. This is evidenced by the design of the Confucius Tablet. The design of the monument uses the dragon, the oldest totem in China, as a design element, and the mythological 'dragon' is processed in a second way. The design was further carved in the Ming dynasty, until the Qing dynasty, when two dragons became entwined, enhancing the three-dimensionality of the monument. This is not only an expression of the creator's devotion to Confucianism, but also a reflection of the depth of Confucian aesthetics.

3.3. The beauty of harmony with the shape of the object

The Konglin carvings have a neutral beauty. The "neutral beauty" comes from Confucius' Confucian idea of the middle ground. As Confucius said, "If quality is better than literature, it is wild; if literature is better than quality, it is history; if literature is quality, it is refined, and then a gentleman". [10] This impartial idea of the middle ground is profoundly reflected in the creator. "This root is mainly expressed in Confucianism as a sense of perfection and beauty that emphasizes virtue and harmony. From the ancient wisdom of art and life, this foundation is mainly implied in the basic aesthetic categories such as the harmony of emotion and reason, the harmony of form and spirit, the interplay between reality and reality, the interplay between rigidity and flexibility, the meaning of words and the nature of the body, and the debate between rhythm and mood.

The design of Konglin's stone carvings is based on the design principle of following the shape of the object. In other words, the designer first takes the form of the stone to design the work. For example, the stone lions, stone tigers, stone leopards, stone sheep, stone horses and other stone animals on either side of the sacred pathway of the Confucius Forest are carved in the round, using the technique of taking the image of the stone. The different sizes of stone not only created a variety of forms for the designer, but also enhanced the beauty of the variations in the stone carvings at the monument.

In essence, in Confucianism it is mainly expressed in the spirit of inquiry and practical rationality of knowing, serving and using the heavens, with the aim of achieving a gentlemanly personality of literary quality and refinement." [11] Thus, the stone carvings at Konglin follow the principle of 'neutral beauty' and are shaped in accordance with their category. This is also evident in the shape of the stone carvings at Konglin. For example, the Han Dynasty stone figures and tigers in Fig. 1 are carved in a rough, rounded design, but when it came to the eyes and other five senses, the carver's knife technique became delicate and subtle. For example, the stone horses and stone figures beside the tomb of the seventy-third generation of Confucius's diffractors in the Qing dynasty are similarly carved from whole stone, in one piece, with a rough and bold external knife-work, which is overly similar to that of the stone horses on Huo's tombstone, both highlighting the majestic aesthetic characteristics of the Han dynasty. "With its broad, sober and vivid meteorology, its fullness of form, its poised and romantic thinking, and its lively and exuberant momentum, this image reproduces the open and confident mind and the passionate and soaring spiritual vitality of its creator." [12]

Through analysis we learn that the Konglin carvings are shaped in a variety of forms to suit the object. The design principles of neutral beauty are used in the form of the objects. On the one hand, it expresses that the maker began to design objects with a Confucian outlook. On the other hand, the Confucian concept of aesthetics began to be accepted in traditional Chinese handicrafts, and the Confucian concept of neutral beauty had a profound influence on the transmission of handicrafts.

4. Conclusion

In summary, an analysis of the art of Konglin stone carving shows that it is of exquisite skill and rich in connotation. The Confucius Grove inscriptions were accepted by the literati community for their adherence to the ritual system, and for the natural integration of 'family' and 'state'. Secondly, the shape and aesthetic connotations of the stone carvings are closely related to Confucianism. With the strengthening of imperial power during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Confucianism was revered and Confucius and his descendants were treated with respect. The spatial design of the stone carvings at Confucius Grove also strictly follows the moral ethics of ritual. Finally, interpreting the aesthetic value of the stone carvings in Confucianism, they have the beauty of text in a variety of forms, the beauty of reproduction in a variety

of shapes; and the beauty of neutrality in the shape of the object to which they are assigned. In this way, Confucian Confucian stone carvings have multiple aesthetic connotations, including artistic, ethical, historical and cultural.

The coexistence of peace and local wars in today's world, coupled with the spread of the New Crown virus, has led to the destruction of the global cultural ecosystem. "In 1989 the world's Nobel laureates, gathered in Paris, came to the astonishing conclusion that if mankind is to survive in the twenty-first century, it must go back 2,500 years and imbibe the wisdom of Confucius." The spread of Confucianism is conducive to a better understanding of Chinese culture in the world. The reinterpretation of the value of the stone carvings of Confucius today has important contemporary significance. On the one hand, the value of the stone inscriptions of Confucius is considered an important resource for international cultural exchange, laying the foundation for the spread of Confucian culture and contributing to the cultural diversity of the world's peoples. On the one hand, the value of the Konglin stone carvings serves as a cultural link for the spread of Confucianism, allowing compatriots around the world to gain an in-depth understanding of the culture and connotations of Chinese art. It is conducive to the unification of the national spirit and the spirit of the times. In short, in the context of the globalisation of information, it is of great contemporary significance for the spread of Confucian culture and international exchange that we revisit Confucian art classics today and discover their aesthetic connotations.

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