

A Comparative Study of Eastern and Western Religious Aesthetics: Philosophical and Axiological Perspectives on Dunhuang and Byzantine Murals

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Abstract: This study explores the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western religious art by conducting an in-depth analysis of Dunhuang murals and Byzantine murals in terms of historical context, artistic style, and religious connotation. As a remarkable representative of Chinese Buddhist art, Dunhuang murals incorporate elements of diverse cultures, showcasing the spread and localisation of Buddhism in China. Byzantine murals, on the other hand, exemplify Christian art, reflecting the spread and development of Christianity in the Eastern Roman Empire, emphasising holiness and symbolism. The study finds that Dunhuang murals focus on the detailed depiction and dynamic expression of figures, while Byzantine murals stress the flatness of images and the symbolic meaning of colors. Despite their differences, both convey religious doctrines through murals and play significant roles in their respective cultures. Future research could further explore the interaction and influence of Chinese and Western religious art in the context of globalization, utilizing modern technological methods and interdisciplinary studies to reveal their rich connotations and historical value. Religious art is not only a visual expression of faith but also a testament to cultural exchange and fusion, possessing significant educational, enlightening, and protective value.

Keywords: Religious Art; Dunhuang Murals; Byzantine Murals; Artistic Style; Religious Belief.

1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese and Western religious art are visual expressions of cultural exchange and religious belief, showing their unique artistic styles and profound cultural connotations (Zhuo, 2023). The Dunhuang murals and Byzantine murals represent the peaks of Buddhist and Christian art, respectively. They have notable historical backgrounds, artistic styles, and religious meanings, with both significant differences and certain connections. The Dunhuang murals, located in the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang, Gansu Province, China, are outstanding representatives of Buddhist art, and their creation spans multiple dynasties, reflecting the spread and localization of Buddhism in China (Shih, 1993; Wang, Song, Zhang, & Jiang, 2018). The artistic style of Dunhuang murals is diverse, influenced by India, Central Asia, Persia, and others, forming a unique

visual expression. The subject matter is rich and varied, including Buddhist stories, character images, and social life scenes. In terms of color usage, Dunhuang murals primarily feature vivid red, green, blue, yellow, and other colors, with decorative and symbolic meanings. Byzantine murals are a paradigm of Christian art, originating during the period of the Eastern Roman Empire, deeply influenced by Greek-Roman culture (AL-AKAM & Rasheed, 2022; Mickūnaitė, 2019). The artistic style of Byzantine murals is characterized by solemnity, mystery, and symbolism, often used for decorating churches, aimed at educating believers and conveying religious teachings. The use of color is meticulous, often employing a golden background symbolizing the sacred and eternal. The two also have significant differences in painting techniques; Dunhuang murals employ the wet fresco technique, whereas Byzantine murals use the dry fresco method. The differences in religious art between the East and West in terms of cultural background, religious beliefs, and artistic expression reflect the uniqueness and universality of their respective cultures. Nevertheless, both Dunhuang murals and Byzantine murals convey religious teachings through the medium of murals, educate believers, and play an important role in social culture. Future research can further explore the interactions and influences of religious aesthetics in the context of globalization, interdisciplinary research will provide new methods and perspectives for studying religious aesthetics. Religious aesthetics is a visual expression of religious beliefs but also a witness to cultural exchange and integration, holding important educational and enlightening functions. Through the study of religious aesthetics from both the East and the West, we can better understand the religious beliefs and artistic expressions in different cultural contexts, promoting dialogue and understanding between cultures.

2. OVERVIEW OF RELIGIOUS AESTHETICS FROM THE EAST AND THE WEST

2.1. Definition and Scope of Religious Aesthetics

Religious art is the expression of religious beliefs centered on the theme of faith, manifested through visual art forms that represent religious concepts, beliefs, and rituals (Nasr, 2006). Its scope encompasses various forms of art, including painting, sculpture, architecture, and decorative art. Religious art is not only a visual expression of religious beliefs but also an important component of religious culture. It embodies the sanctity, rituality, and symbolism of religion through art, allowing believers to deepen their faith through visual perception and spiritual experience. In the

West, religious art is mainly associated with Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, particularly the peak of Christian art during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance(Mâle, 1982). Christian art presents biblical stories, depictions of saints, and religious rituals through murals, stained glass, and sculptures(Jensen, 2013). In the East, religious art is mainly related to Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, especially Buddhist art, which has a profound influence in places like China, India, and Japan. Buddhist art is expressed through forms like murals, sculptures, and pagodas, depicting images of the Buddha, Buddhist stories, and religious rituals(Dehejia, 1990).

2.2. The Development Context of Religious Art in the East and the West

The beauty of religious art in both the East and West has its own unique historical background. In the West, the development of religious art is closely related to the spread and development of Christianity. The comparison of religious beauty art between the East and West is shown in Table 1. Early Christian art was mainly influenced by Roman and Greek art. As Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, religious beauty art gradually became the mainstream of artistic creation(Anguissola, 2007). During the Middle Ages, Byzantine art became the representative of religious beauty art with its unique style and techniques, emphasizing holiness and symbolism. During the period of the Renaissance, religious art reached new heights under the influence of realism and humanism, with artists like Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci showcasing extraordinary artistic skills and profound religious thoughts through works with religious themes.

Table 1: Comparison of Dunhuang Murals and Byzantine Murals

Aspect	Eastern Religious Art	Western Religious Art
Religious Forms	Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism	Christianity, Judaism, Islam
Art Styles	Ink painting, meticulous painting, sculpture	Oil painting, fresco, sculpture
Themes	Immortals, Buddha, Taoist deities, natural elements	Jesus, Virgin Mary, saints, religious narratives
Techniques	Emphasis on harmony of lines and colors, focus on meaning and symbolism	Attention to light and shadow, perspective, emotional and sacred representation
Functions	Worship, blessings, moral teachings	Worship, storytelling from the Bible, educating followers
Materials	Rice paper; silk, wood	Canvas, wood panels, plaster
Representative Works	Along the River During the Qingming Festival/ "Statue of Shakyamuni Buddha	The Last Supper," Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam

In the East, religious art is closely related to the propagation and development of Buddhism. After Buddhism was introduced to China from India, it integrated with local culture, forming a unique style of Buddhist art. The Dunhuang murals represent Chinese Buddhist art, showcasing the evolution of Buddhist art from the Northern Wei to the Yuan dynasties(Hung, 1986). Not only are they a visual expression of religious faith, but they also witness the exchange between Eastern and Western cultures. With the spread of Buddhism, Buddhist art has developed distinct styles in Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and other regions(Huntington, 1990).

2.3. Characteristics of Religious Art

The beauty of religion in the East and West art has both commonalities and differences in artistic characteristics. Western religious art emphasizes realism and symbolism, expressing religious themes through intricate compositions, rich colors, and delicate brushwork. Byzantine art is known for its golden backgrounds, flat figures, and solemn compositions, emphasizing sanctity and transcendence. The religious art of the Renaissance expressed a high degree of realism and humanistic spirit through the use of perspective and anatomy. Eastern religious art, on the other hand, pays more attention to the use of lines and the expression of ideas. Dunhuang murals showcase smooth lines, vivid colors, and lively imagery to depict Buddhist stories and figures. Eastern religious art emphasizes symbolism and meaning, expressing the mystery and philosophy of religion through concise brushwork and rich imagination.

2.4. Social Functions of Religious Art

Religious art plays multiple roles in society. First, it serves as a visual expression of religious belief, manifesting religious concepts and beliefs

through artistic forms, allowing believers to deepen their faith through visual perception and spiritual experience. Secondly, religious art is an important tool for religious education, communicating religious teachings and moral values through images and symbols, helping believers understand and accept their faith. In addition, religious art is also an important component of religious rituals, enhancing the sanctity and solemnity of the ceremony through artistic forms, enriching believers' religious experiences. In the West, religious art has become an important part of religious ceremonies and education through forms such as church murals, sculptures, and stained glass. In the East, religious art serves as an important medium for religious beliefs and cultural transmission through

forms like temple murals, Buddha statues, and pagodas.

2.5. The Relationship between Religious Art and Religious Beliefs

Religious art and religious beliefs are closely related. Religious beliefs provide rich materials and inspiration for religious art, and religious art deepens and transmits religious beliefs through the form of visual arts. Religious art is not only a means of expressing religious beliefs, but also an important component of those beliefs. In the West, religious art deepens the transmission and influence of Christian faith through the representation of biblical stories, images of saints, and religious rituals. In the East, religious art deepens the transmission and influence of Buddhism through the representation of the Buddha, Buddhist stories, and religious rituals. Through its unique artistic forms and symbolism, religious art makes religious beliefs more vivid and concrete, enhancing the religious experiences and faith identification of believers. The religious art of the East and West has its own characteristics in terms of expression, artistic features, and social functions, but both deepen and disseminate religious beliefs through artistic forms, becoming an important part of religious culture. By comparing the religious art of the East and West, we can gain a deeper understanding of the forms of expression and social functions of religious art in different cultural contexts, as well as its close relationship with religious beliefs.

3. DUNHUANG MURALS ART RESEARCH

3.1. Historical Background of Dunhuang Murals

The Dunhuang murals are located in the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang, Gansu Province, China. They are among the most renowned Buddhist art treasures in the world (Kenderdine, 2013). The creation of the Dunhuang murals began during the Sixteen Kingdoms period, spanning multiple dynasties, including the Northern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Zhou, Sui, Tang, Five Dynasties, Song, Western Xia, Yuan, and continued for about a thousand years (Qinglin et al., 2010). Dunhuang is located at a key point on the Silk Road, becoming a hub for cultural exchange between the East and West. This geographical position has allowed the Dunhuang murals to present diversified characteristics in artistic styles and content. The historical background of the Dunhuang murals not only reflects the propagation and development of Buddhism in China but also embodies the blending of Chinese and Western cultures. With the prosperity of the Silk Road, artistic styles and techniques from India, Persia, Greece, and

other regions have been integrated into the Dunhuang murals, forming a unique artistic appearance. During the Tang Dynasty, the Dunhuang murals reached the peak of artistic creation, with the scale, quantity, and artistic level all achieving unprecedented heights.

3.2. The Content of the Dunhuang Murals Materials

The themes of Dunhuang murals are rich and diverse, as shown in Figure 1, mainly including Buddhist stories, Buddhist figures, images of patrons, and scenes of social life(Guo et al., 2018). Buddhist stories are an important part of Dunhuang murals, commonly featuring the life stories of Shakyamuni, stories of the Buddha, stories of causes and effects, etc. These stories vividly convey the teachings and philosophy of Buddhism to the viewers through dynamic images and delicate depictions. Images of Buddhist figures are another important theme of Dunhuang murals, mainly including the Buddha, bodhisattvas, arhats, and heavenly kings. The Buddhist figures in the murals are diverse, with different postures that express various divine demeanors and qualities. The portraits of patrons reflect the beliefs and offerings of various social classes in society towards Buddhism at that time. These portraits not only have religious significance but also provide valuable materials for studying ancient social life. Social life scenes also hold an important place in the Dunhuang murals; these images vividly recreate the daily lives, production activities, and recreational activities of ancient people, offering us a direct visual resource to understand ancient society(Zhou, 2022).



Figure 1: The Themes and Content of Dunhuang Murals

3.3. The Artistic Styles of Dunhuang Murals

The artistic style of Dunhuang murals is diverse and has evolved over time to different social contexts and cultural exchanges. Early murals were

greatly influenced by Indian and Central Asian art, featuring vivid colors and characters that exude strong exoticism, as shown in figure 2. During the Northern Wei period, the mural style began to localize, with characters starting to exhibit traditional Chinese aesthetic traits, with more concise lines and more rigorous compositions (Yang, Xu, Tang, Yang, & Zhao, 2014). The Sui and Tang periods are considered the golden age of Dunhuang mural art, where the murals of this period exhibited a mature style that showed high levels of artistic quality and creativity. Tang dynasty murals are renowned for their grand compositions, rich colors, and intricate details. The figures are vivid and expressive, reflecting the prosperity and openness of the Tang society. During the Song and Yuan periods, Dunhuang murals adopted a more minimalist style, with smoother lines and softer color applications, and the figures became more realistic. The murals from this period not only inherited the artistic traditions of the Tang dynasty but also incorporated more local characteristics and folk art elements.



Figure 2: Dunhuang Murals' Line Artistic Style

3.4. The use of Color in Dunhuang Murals

The use of color is one of the important characteristics of Dunhuang murals. The colors of Dunhuang murals are rich and varied, commonly including red, blue, green, yellow, white, black, etc., these colors can create unique visual effects through different combinations and arrangements. The colors in the murals not only serve a decorative purpose, but also carry symbolic meanings, different colors represent different religious connotations and cultural meanings (Li, Lu, & Pan, 2000). In Dunhuang murals, red is often used to represent the clothing and background of

Buddhist figures, symbolizing auspiciousness and holiness; blue is often used for the sky and water surfaces, symbolizing tranquility and depth; green is often used for plants and rocks, symbolizing life and nature; yellow is used to depict the Buddha's light and sacred imagery, symbolizing brightness and wisdom. White and black are often used in the murals for outlining and shadowing, enhancing the sense of layering and three-dimensionality in the painting. The use of colors in Dunhuang murals not only reflects the purpose of soft heartists but also reveals the social culture and religious concepts of different periods. Through the clever use of colors, artists create vivid artistic worlds in the murals, attracting the attention of viewers, as shown in Figure 3.

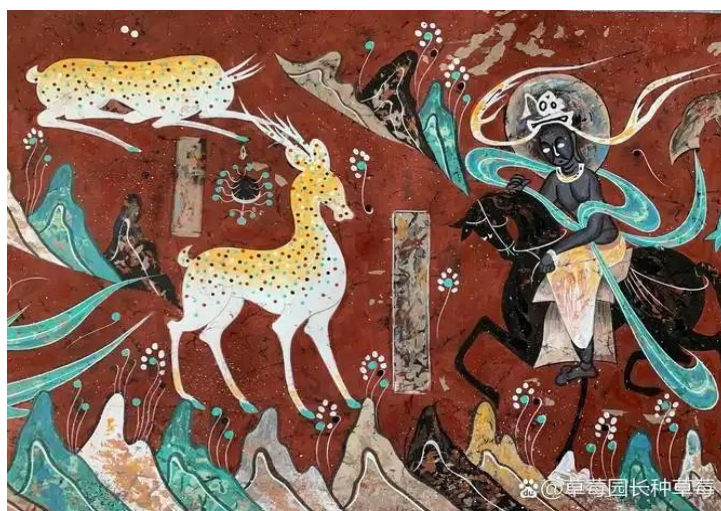


Figure 3: Dunhuang Murals' Color Features

3.5. The Cultural Connotations of Dunhuang Murals

Dunhuang murals are not only the crystallization of art but also a carrier of culture, containing rich cultural connotations. Firstly, Dunhuang murals reflect the propagation and development of Buddhism in China, with the Buddhist stories and character images in the murals vividly reproducing Buddhist teachings and philosophies, providing important visual materials for the study of Buddhist culture. Secondly, Dunhuang murals embody the fusion of Eastern and Western cultures. As a pivotal point on the Silk Road, Dunhuang serves as a bridge for cultural exchanges between the East and the West, integrating artistic elements from India, Persia, Greece, and other regions into a unique artistic style. This cultural fusion is reflected not only in artistic style but also in the subject matter and expressive techniques of the murals. Moreover, Dunhuang murals illustrate the lifestyle and customs of ancient societies. The social life scenes, vivid portraits of donors, and rich depictions of clothing and objects in the murals offer valuable

materials for understanding the economy, culture, and religion of ancient society. The cultural connotations of Dunhuang murals are evident not only in their artistic expression but also in their historical value and academic significance. Through the study of Dunhuang murals, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural landscape and historical development of ancient society, providing references and inspiration for contemporary artistic creation and cultural research.

4. BYZANTINE MURALS ART RESEARCH

4.1. The Historical Origins of Byzantine Murals

Byzantine mural art originated in the Eastern Roman Empire period, and its development is closely related to the transmission of Christianity. The Byzantine Empire was established in AD 330, when Constantine the Great moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium and renamed it Constantinople. At that time, Christianity gradually became the state religion, and religious art occupied an important place in the cultural life of the empire. Byzantine murals were an important form of religious art, carrying the function of spreading faith and doctrine (Maguire, 1974). The early development of Byzantine mural art was influenced by Roman and Greek artistic traditions, and it also absorbed elements of Eastern art. With the expansion of the empire, Byzantine art gradually developed a unique style, renowned for its rich religious themes and exquisite craftsmanship. Byzantine murals were not only widely spread within the empire, but also influenced the artistic development of surrounding regions such as Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Middle East. The peak period of Byzantine mural art was from the 6th to the 12th centuries, during which the mural works reached a high level of sophistication in technique and style. The murals of Hagia Sophia are one of the representative works of this period, showcasing the magnificent scale and exquisite decoration that demonstrate the glorious achievements of Byzantine mural art. As the Byzantine Empire declined, mural art gradually fell into decline, but its influence remained profound.

4.2. The Themes and Symbols

The main theme primarily centres around Christian religious stories and figures, aiming to convey religious meaning and faith through visual arts, as shown in Figure 4. Commonly seen, include the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints' biographies, as well as significant events in the Old and

New Testament. These themes not only have a function of religious education but also through art express the fervour and awe of believers (Figueras, 2003). Figures in Byzantine murals often carry symbolic meaning. Christ is often depicted as the almighty savior, with a halo over his head, symbolizing his divine status. The Virgin Mary is often portrayed with a gentle and loving image, symbolizing maternal love and compassion. Saints are typically depicted as steadfast believers, symbolizing loyalty and courage in faith. In addition to the character imagery, the colors and composition in Byzantine murals also have symbolic meanings. Gold is often used in the background, symbolizing the light of heaven and the sacred realm. Blue and red are frequently used in the clothing of figures, symbolizing the divine and humanity respectively. In terms of composition, Byzantine murals often adopt symmetrical layouts, symbolizing the harmony and order of the universe.



Figure 4: Themes of Byzantine Murals

4.3. Techniques of Painting in Byzantine Murals.

The painting technique of Byzantine murals is renowned for its precision and complexity, primarily using the wet plaster painting technique, as shown in Figure 5. This technique requires the painter to work on wet plaster, allowing the pigments to bond tightly with the surface, ensuring the durability of the mural and the vividness of its colors. The wet plaster technique requires the artist to complete the work quickly, which places high demands on skill and proficiency in the technique. The process of creating Byzantine murals typically involves multiple steps (Daniilia, Minopoulou, Andrikopoulos, Tsakalof, & Bairachtari, 2008; Hein, Karatasios, & Mourelatos, 2009). First, the artist applies a layer of coarse plaster as the base layer on the surface, then applies a layer of finer plaster

on top. While the plaster is still wet, the artist begins to paint. In order to ensure the accuracy of the image, artists often use cartoons as a reference, transferring the outline onto the wall. The use of colour in Byzantine frescoes is very meticulous, and artists typically use natural mineral pigments, such as blue lapis lazuli, red cinnabar, and green malachite. These pigments not only have bright colors, but also exhibit good durability. The colour usage in Byzantine frescoes emphasises contrast and layering through the interplay of light and shadow, and the combination of colors enhances the three-dimensional and visual impact of the picture.



Figure 5: Byzantine Wall Painting Techniques

4.4. The Decoration Style of Byzantine Wall Paintings

The decoration style of Byzantine murals is renowned for its luxury and delicacy, often combining architectural design with the layout to enhance the sacredness and solemnity of the space. The murals typically cover the walls, ceilings, and arches of churches, creating a complete visual system. The decorative style of the Byzantine mural emphasises an overall harmony of beauty, highlighting the organic integration of images and architectural space. Byzantine mural decoration often employs geometric patterns and plant motifs as background decoration; these patterns serve a decorative function and carry symbolic meanings. Geometric patterns symbolize the order of the universe and eternity while plant motifs represent the prosperity of life and divine creativity. The figures in the mural are usually placed within these decorative patterns, creating a striking contrast. The decorative style of Byzantine murals also reflects attention to detail. Painters often express facial expressions and the texture of clothing through intricate lines and rich color variations. This focus on detail not

only enhances the visual effect of the mural but also lends it greater artistic value.

4.5. The Religious Significance of Byzantine Murals

Byzantine murals play an important role in religious life, with their religious significance reflected not only in artistic representation but also in their function and impact. As tools for religious education, Byzantine murals spread Christian teachings through visual art, allowing believers to understand and experience their faith more intuitively. Byzantine murals also serve a function in religious rituals. In churches, murals are often used as backgrounds for religious ceremonies, enhancing the sanctity and solemnity of the rituals. The religious figures and stories depicted in the murals inspire the devotion of the faithful and play a guiding and enlightening role in religious ceremonies. The religious significance of Byzantine murals is also evident in their influence on the spiritual lives of believers. Through the religious figures and stories in the murals, believers can sense the presence of the divine and the power of their faith. This visual art's ability to resonate not only enhances the religious experience of the faithful but also promotes the spread and development of religious beliefs. As an important form of religious art, Byzantine mural art's historical origins, themes and symbols, painting techniques, decorative styles, and religious significance collectively constitute its rich artistic connotations and profound influence. By studying Byzantine mural art, we can gain a deeper understanding of Byzantine culture and religious beliefs, as well as draw inspiration and wisdom for artistic creation.

5. COMPARISON OF DUNHUANG MURALS AND BYZANTINE MURALS

The exchange and integration of religious art between the East and West can be traced back to the opening of the ancient Silk Road. As an important hub on the Silk Road, Dunhuang absorbed diverse cultural elements, while Byzantium, through contact with Eastern cultures, formed its unique artistic style, the comparison of Dunhuang murals and Byzantine murals is shown in Figure 2. In contemporary times, the role and influence of religious art have undergone significant changes. The digital preservation projects of Dunhuang murals and the application of Byzantine murals in modern art demonstrate the adaptability of religious art in a new cultural context.

Table 2: Comparison of Dunhuang Murals and Byzantine Murals

Aspect	Dunhuang Murals	Byzantine Murals
Cultural Context	Buddhist art in China, influenced by the Silk Road trade	Christian art in the Eastern Roman Empire
Themes	Buddhist stories, bodhisattvas, celestial beings	Biblical stories, saints, Christ, the Virgin Mary
Style	Naturalistic with colourful, detailed depictions	Iconic and stylized, use of gold and flat colors
Techniques	Fresco technique, use of mineral pigments	Mosaic and fresco techniques, often with gold leaf
Symbolism	Emphasis on enlightenment, compassion, and spiritual journeys	Emphasis on divine presence, salvation, and the eternal
Spatial Representation	Three-dimensional space with depth and perspective	Two-dimensional, often with a hierarchical layout
Materials	Natural pigments on plaster walls	Glass tesserae for mosaics, plaster for frescoes
Notable Examples	Mogao Caves murals	Hagia Sophia, San Vitale murals

5.1. Title Material Content Comparison

The Dunhuang murals and the Byzantine murals in terms of subject matter reflect the unique characteristics of their respective cultures and religions. The Dunhuang murals primarily depict Buddhist stories, statues, bodhisattvas, celestial beings, offerings, and illustrations of Buddhist scriptures. These murals are not only a manifestation of religious belief, but also a record of social life, historical events and folk customs. The Buddhist subject matter in the Dunhuang murals reflects the spread and localization of Buddhism in China, especially through local adaptations of Buddhist stories, showcasing the fusion of Central Plains culture and Buddhist culture. On the other hand, Byzantine murals mainly focus on Christian themes, primarily depicting biblical stories, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints, and angels among other religious figures. Byzantine murals are often used to adorn churches, aimed at educating believers, conveying religious doctrines and enhancing the religious atmosphere. The content of Byzantine mural themes strictly adheres to religious doctrines and church regulations, possessing significant sanctity and educational function. The differences in theme content between the two reflect the variations in cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, and social functions of religious art in the East and West. The themes of Dunhuang murals are relatively rich and diverse, encompassing both religious content and depictions of secular

life. In contrast, Byzantine murals focus more on religious content, emphasizing the sanctity of religion and its instructional role.

5.2. Artistic Styles Comparison

The Dunhuang murals and Byzantine murals have their own distinct artistic styles. The art style of Dunhuang murals is varied and diverse, evolving over different periods of time. Early Dunhuang murals were influenced by Indian and Central Asian art, featuring sinuous lines and, vibrant colors, with lively figures. The mid-period murals gradually incorporated Central Plains artistic styles, with more delicate lines and more realistic figures. The late-period mural transmits a simplified and abstract style, with bolder use of colors. Byzantine murals are characterised by solemnity, mystery, and symbolism. Byzantine art emphasizes the symmetry of forms and the symbolic meaning of images, with figures typically possessing fixed postures and expressions, highlighting the sacred and transcendent nature of art. Byzantine murals often use a golden background to enhance the sacredness and visual impact of the picture. The differences in artistic styles reflect the different pursuits of Eastern and Western cultures in artistic expression. Dunhuang murals focus more on the dynamics and emotions of characters, emphasizing harmony between humans and nature. In contrast, Byzantine murals pay more attention to the holiness of form and symbolic meaning, emphasizing the transcendence and mystique of religion.

5.3. Painting Technique Comparison

The Dunhuang murals and Byzantine murals have significant obvious differences in their painting techniques. The main technique used in the Dunhuang murals is the wet wall painting method with mineral pigments, which involves applying the pigments directly to the wet mud walls. The technique requires the artist to complete the work before the pigments dry, thus demanding a high level of skill and speed. The Dunhuang murals have smooth lines and vibrant colors and exhibit a strong sense of visual impact. The Byzantine murals use the dry plaster technique, where the colors are applied to dry plaster walls. This technique allows the artist to make multiple modifications and adjustments, resulting in a more refined and durable painting. The lines in Byzantine murals are relatively simple, with color usage being more meticulous, often employing gold and blue colors that symbolize the sacred. The differences in painting techniques not only reflect different artistic traditions and skill sets, but also demonstrate the

different explorations of material usage and technique innovation by Eastern and Western artists. The techniques used in Dunhuang murals are more direct and bold, while Byzantine murals are more delicate and exquisite.

5.4. Comparison of Color Usage

The use of color is one of the important features of Dunhuang murals and Byzantine murals. Color in Dunhuang murals is rich and diverse, often using red, green, yellow and blue in bright colors, forming strong color contrasts and visual effects. The colors in Dunhuang murals not only serve as decoration and beautification but also have symbolic meanings, such as red symbolizing passion and vitality, and green symbolizing peace and tranquillity. The use of color in Byzantine murals is more focused on methodology and symbolism. Byzantine art often uses golden backgrounds, symbolizing divinity and eternity, blue symbolizing heaven and mystery, and red symbolizing the Holy Spirit and love. The use of color in Byzantine murals emphasizes the symbolic meanings of colors and religious implications, with the combinations and contrasts of colors being meticulously designed to enhance the sacredness and visual impact of the image. The differences in the use of color between the two reflect the artistic color concepts and the pursuit of aesthetic values. The color use in Dunhuang murals is more free and varied, strongly highlighting the decorative and symbolic nature of colors. In contrast, the color use in Byzantine murals is more rigorous and symbolic, emphasizing the religious significance of colors and visual effects.

5.5. Comparison of Cultural Connotations

The Dunhuang murals and Byzantine murals reflect the deep differences in religious art between the East and the West in terms of cultural connotation. Dunhuang murals are not only a representation of Buddhist art but also a testament to the cultural exchange between the East and West. As an important junction on the Silk Road, Dunhuang absorbed cultural elements from India, Central Asia, Persia, and other places, forming a unique artistic style and cultural connotation. The Buddhist themes in Dunhuang murals not only reflect the spread and localization of Buddhism in China but also embody the integration of Central Plains culture with foreign cultures. Byzantine murals, on the other hand, are exemplars of Christian art, reflecting the religious beliefs and cultural values of the Byzantine Empire. The cultural connotation of Byzantine murals is

primarily manifested in their religious symbolism and educational functions. Byzantine art emphasizes the sacredness and transcendence of religion, communicating religious doctrines and moral concepts through murals, enhancing the religious faith and spiritual strength of believers. The differences in cultural connotation between the two reflect the different cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, and social functions of religious art in the East and the West. The cultural connotation of Dunhuang murals is more diverse and open, reflecting the exchange and integration of Eastern and Western cultures, while the cultural connotation of Byzantine murals is more focused and sacred, reflecting the profound influence of Christian culture and the steadfastness of religious faith.

6. INFLUENCING FACTORS OF RELIGIOUS ART IN THE EAST AND WEST

The beauty of Western and Eastern religious arts has formed its own unique style and characteristics throughout history, and this difference not only manifests in artistic expressions, but at a deeper level is influenced by various factors. The following will explore five aspects: religious beliefs, cultural traditions, social backgrounds, artistic concepts, and aesthetic viewpoints. An in-depth discussion will be carried out.

6.1. The Influence of Religious Beliefs

Religious belief is the core force of religious art creation. The Dunhuang murals and Byzantine murals are, respectively, profoundly influenced by Buddhism and Christianity. The expression of Buddhism in the Dunhuang murals is not only a reproduction of religious stories, but also a visual representation of Buddhist teachings. The images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Arhats in the murals reflect the concepts of compassion, wisdom, and liberation in Buddhism. The beliefs in reincarnation, cause and effect, and retribution emphasized by Buddhism are manifested in the murals through colors, compositions, and character expressions. The Byzantine murals, on the other hand, are deeply influenced by Christian beliefs, especially the mysticism of Eastern Orthodoxy and icon worship. The concepts of redemption, resurrection, and eternal life emphasized by Christianity are expressed through the images of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and saints in the murals. The icons in Byzantine murals are not only symbols of religious faith but also a medium for believers to communicate with the divine. The golden background and solemn composition in the

mural reflect the Christian pursuit of the sacred and the eternal.

6.2. The Influence of Cultural Traditions

Cultural traditions have a profound impact on religious aesthetics that is deep and complex. In the cultural context of Dunhuang murals, the convergence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism creates an environment that allows Buddhists to incorporate rich local elements in its expressive forms. Confucian ethics, Taoist natural philosophy, and Buddhist liberation concepts interplay within the Dunhuang murals, forming a unique artistic style. The figures in the murals often exhibit traditional Chinese attire and facial features, which are products of this cultural fusion, allowing Buddhist art to localise in China. The Byzantine murals developed from Greek and Roman cultural traditions. The rationalism of Greek culture and the legal concepts of Roman culture have profoundly influenced Christianity. The figures in Byzantine frescoes often have classical proportions and poses; this influence of classicism gives Byzantine art a rational and orderly aesthetic when expressing religious themes. Additionally, the Eastern elements in Byzantine culture, such as Persian and Arab decorative styles, are also reflected in the frescoes.

6.3. The Influence of Social Background

The social background is an important factor affecting the development of religious art. The creation of the Dunhuang murals occurred during the period of the Sui and Tang to Song and Yuan dynasties in Chinese history. This period was marked by social stability and economic prosperity, which provided good conditions for the development of religious art. The opening of the Silk Road facilitated frequent exchanges between Chinese and Western cultures, and Dunhuang, as a crossroads of East and West, thus had murals that exhibited a diverse character. The social openness and inclusiveness allowed the Dunhuang murals to constantly innovate in themes and techniques. The creation of Byzantine murals, on the other hand, took place against the political and religious background of the Byzantine Empire. The intertwining of imperial power and ecclesiastical authority in the Byzantine Empire led to religious art becoming an important tool for political propaganda. The religious images in the murals not only express faith, but also symbolize the sanctification of imperial authority. The rise and fall of the Byzantine Empire directly influenced the development of mural art. During the empire's peak, mural art reached its pinnacle, while in the period of the empire's decline, mural art also declined.

6.4. The Influence of Art Concepts

The differences in art concepts between East and West are an important reason for the differences in religious aesthetics and artistic styles.

Dunhuang murals emphasise artistic concepts that stress the integration of realism and ideals, focusing on the vividness of human figures and the narrative qualities of storylines. The figures in the murals often have dynamic poses and rich expressions, and this kind of artistic concept gives the Dunhuang murals a sense of liveliness and intimacy when depicting religious themes. The Byzantine murals emphasize the combination of symbolism and abstraction in artistic concepts, focusing on the sacredness and transcendence of religious imagery. The figures in these murals often have static poses and solemn expressions, which gives Byzantine murals a sense of mystery and grandeur when depicting religious themes. Byzantine artists create a visual effect that transcends reality through the use of color and composition, expressing the mystery and eternity of religion.

6.5. The Influence of Aesthetics Concepts

The aesthetic concepts directly influence the religious art's expression forms and styles. The aesthetic concepts of Dunhuang murals are influenced by traditional Chinese aesthetics, emphasizing harmonious beauty, natural beauty, and the beauty of artistic conception. The colour usage in the murals is rich and harmonious, with the composition focusing on proportion and balance and the portrayal of figures paying attention to details and spirit. This aesthetic concept gives Dunhuang murals a sense of harmonious and tranquil beauty. The aesthetic concepts of Byzantine murals, however, are influenced by Greek classical aesthetics, emphasizing rational beauty, order, and sacred beauty. The colour usage in these murals is simple and solemn, with the composition focusing on geometry and proportion and the portrayal of figures emphasizing idealization and abstraction. This aesthetic concept gives Byzantine murals a sense of solemnity and sublime beauty. Byzantine artists created a sacred and transcendent visual effect through the use of color contrast and light and shadow, expressing the mystery and eternity of religion. Through the analysis of influencing factors on religious art in both Eastern and Western cultures, it is evident that religious beliefs, cultural traditions, social backgrounds, artistic concepts, and aesthetic values jointly shape the unique styles of Dunhuang murals and Byzantine frescoes. These factors not only influence the forms of expression in religious art but also profoundly reflect the differences and commonalities between Eastern and Western cultures.

7. THE CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT OF EASTERN AND WESTERN RELIGIOUS ART

In contemporary society, the role and influence of religion are significant. With the acceleration of globalisation and the integration of diverse cultures, religious art is no longer just a symbol of religious faith but has become an important medium for cultural exchange and social dialogue. In China, the Dunhuang murals, as distinguished representations of Buddhist art, have attracted a great deal of attention from scholars and artists. In recent years, the digital preservation project of Dunhuang murals has allowed these precious artworks to be disseminated globally, promoting understanding and exchange among different cultures. In the West, Byzantine murals continue to play an important role in religious settings, while also being included in modern art exhibitions. Many contemporary artists draw inspiration from Byzantine art, incorporating its elements into modern works to explore themes such as faith, identity, and history. This trend not only reflects the ongoing influence of religious beauty in contemporary society but also showcases its adaptability in new cultural contexts. Contemporary art's influence on religious beauty is multifaceted. The diversity and innovation of modern art movements provide new forms of expression and mediums for religious beauty. Many artists reinterpret traditional religious themes through modern techniques and materials, creating religious artworks that have a sense of modernity. For example, by utilizing digital technology and multimedia means, artists are able to recreate and transform religious images in virtual space, allowing them to resonate with contemporary audiences. In addition, the conceptual and critical nature of contemporary art also prompts religious art to engage in self-reflection and innovation. Artists often explore the social significance and personal experiences of religious beliefs through their works, challenging the boundaries of traditional religious art. This kind of interaction not only enriches the forms of expression in religious art but also promotes its development within the context of contemporary art. Religious beauty's innovation and development in the present era is manifested as a fusion of traditional skills and modern concepts. China's Dunhuang murals gradually integrate into modern art creations based on preservation and restoration. Artists use traditional techniques and colour in modern mural creations, forming a unique artistic style. This innovation not only continues the vitality of traditional art but also injects new vigour into it. In the West, the innovation of Byzantine murals was primarily reflected in the

reinterpretation of traditional imagery and the diversification of expression. Many artists reinterpret the spiritual connotation of Byzantine images through abstract and expressionist techniques, giving them new vitality in contemporary society. This innovation not only enriches the expressive means of religious art but also broadens its application scope in contemporary art. The preservation and transmission of religious art face many challenges and opportunities in contemporary times. With the development of technology, digital preservation techniques provide new possibilities for the preservation of religious art. In Dunhuang, the application of digital technology has made the high precision reproduction of murals possible. This not only helps protect the original works but also facilitates academic research and public education. In terms of preserving Byzantine murals, the advancements in modern restoration techniques have enabled the restoration and preservation of many murals that were on the verge of destruction. At the same time, the strengthening of educational and promotional activities has also promoted the transmission of religious art. Through exhibitions, lectures, and publications, the public's understanding and recognition of religious art have been enhanced, laying a foundation for its continued development in modern society. The relationship between religious art and modern culture manifests a complex and dynamic interaction in contemporary times. Religious art is not only a symbol of traditional culture but also an important component of modern culture. In the context of globalization, religious art has become an important bridge for cross-cultural dialogue through exhibitions, exchanges, and collaborations. In China, the cultural value of the Dunhuang murals is reflected not only in their artistic achievements but also in their symbolic significance as cultural heritage. By integrating with modern culture, the Dunhuang murals have gained new vitality in contemporary society, becoming a vital source of cultural innovation. In the West, Byzantine murals, as symbols of religion and culture, continue to influence modern art and culture. Many artists explore faith and values in modern society through the study and adaptation of Byzantine art. This relationship enriches the connotation of modern culture and provides new impetus for the ongoing development of religious art. Through the discussion of the contemporary development of religious art in both Eastern and Western contexts, it is clear that religious art in modern society is not only a continuation of history and tradition but also an important part of cultural innovation and exchange. Its contemporary development reflects the changes in social culture and demonstrates its adaptability and vitality in the new era.

8. CONCLUSION

This research deeply analyses Dunhuang murals and Byzantine murals, revealing the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western religious art in historical context, artistic style, religious connotation, and other aspects. As an outstanding representative of Chinese Buddhist art, Dunhuang murals reflect the spread and localization of Buddhism in China. Their artistic style integrates elements from diverse cultures, such as India, Greece, and Persia, forming a unique visual expression. Byzantine murals are the epitome of Christian art, reflecting the spread and development of Christianity in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. Their artistic style emphasizes sacredness and symbolism, focusing on expressing religious ritualistic feelings. Through comparative research, we have found significant differences in the methods of expression between Dunhuang murals and Byzantine murals. Dunhuang murals often use line drawing and colour combination, emphasizing detailed portrayal and the dynamic expression of figures, while Byzantine murals emphasize the flatness of images and the symbolic meaning of colors. In addition, the two styles also differ in their religious subject choices; Dunhuang murals often portray Buddhist stories and images of figures, while Byzantine murals focus on the stories from the Bible and Christian saints as the main subjects. The beauty of religious art in the East and West is characterised by both differences and connections in cultural background, religious beliefs, and artistic expression. In terms of cultural background, Dunhuang murals were influenced by the Silk Road, integrating diverse cultural elements, while Byzantine murals were heavily influenced by Greek-Roman culture. Regarding religious beliefs, Dunhuang murals reflect the compassion and wisdom of Buddhism, while Byzantine murals emphasize the holiness and redemption of Christianity. In terms of artistic expression, Dunhuang murals focus on dynamics and details, while Byzantine murals emphasize stillness and symbolism. Despite these differences, the religious art of both East and West also exhibits similarities in certain aspects. Both use murals as a medium to convey religious teachings, educate believers, and play an important role in social culture. Furthermore, both Dunhuang and Byzantine murals became exemplars of religious art during their respective historical periods, having a profound influence on later artistic production. As cultural exchanges deepen, the cross-cultural study of religious aesthetics will become an important topic. Researchers can use modern techniques, such as digitization and virtual reality, to recreate historical scenes, providing a more direct perspective for research. In

addition, interdisciplinary research will also provide new methods and perspectives for the study of religious aesthetics, particularly in the integration of archaeology, anthropology, and history disciplines.

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