

## A TAPESTRY OF TIME: KIZIL GROTTOS AND THEIR CHINESE HERITAGE

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### Article Info

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### Abstract

This paper presents a design of cultural and creative products based on the Kizil Grottoes. The design extracts the main elements of the Kizil Grottoes, such as the Flying Heaven, and combines them with various patterns in the grottoes. It also extracts the Buddha statues, decorative elements and colors from the Kizil Grottoes art, and recreates a series of representative elements by independent processing. The modern design language is incorporated into the design, and the cultural and creative products are applied to them. The design will explore the cultural and artistic value of the Kizil Grottoes to a greater extent, integrate practicality into the design and reflect regional and ethnic cultural characteristics. It will also strengthen the dissemination of the cultural and artistic glory of the Kizil Grottoes with cultural and creative products that have authentic and extensive cultural heritage.

### Introduction

The author extracted the Kizil Grottoes from the Kizil Grottoes and the Flying Heaven as the main elements, combined them with various patterns in the grottoes, extracted the Buddha statues, decorative elements and colors from the Kizil Grottoes art, and recreated a series of representative elements by independent processing, incorporating modern design language into them and applying them to the cultural and creative products. The design will explore the cultural and artistic value of the Kizil Grottoes to a greater extent, integrate practicality into the design and reflect regional and ethnic cultural characteristics, strengthen the dissemination of the cultural and artistic glory of the Kizil Grottoes with cultural and creative products that have authentic and extensive cultural heritage, enable more people to have access to the artistic value of the Kizil Grottoes and understand the culture behind it, promote Chinese national confidence and cultural self-confidence, and enhance cultural development and inheritance. Strengthen cultural development and inheritance, highlight regional ethnic cultural characteristics, and create cultural and creative products with cultural value, contemporary significance, social market value and aesthetic characteristics.

#### 1. Subject and background of the study

##### 1.1 Research Status

The Kizil Grottoes are located in Kizil Township, Baicheng County, Xinjiang. Kizil means red in Uyghur, and there is a naturally formed oasis in front of the cave with beautiful scenery. The grottoes are a trinity of art caves consisting of architecture, frescoes and sculptures, and are known as a synthesis of Buddhist art.

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Kizil Grottoes is currently the earliest large cave complex in China, which was built at the end of the 3rd century and the beginning of the 4th century AD, and declined in the 8th and 9th centuries. There are now 742 relatively complete caves, 349 numbered caves, and nearly 10,000 square meters of preserved frescoes. The Kizil Grottoes are a typical representative of the qiuqi Grottoes, and its murals are a complete record of the process from the creation to the decline of the qiuqi Grottoes, a very important historical treasure reflecting the specific history and cultural heritage of the Chinese West, religious art and folk music and dance, and also a must-see point on the Silk Road. However, due to their long history and remote location in Xinjiang, the grottoes are often subject to geological disasters such as sand erosion, and their conservation and repair work cannot be properly followed up, resulting in a lack of overall preservation and serious damage to the grottoes. There are very few cultural and creative products about the Kizil Grottoes, which lack design and ethnic characteristics.

After the country promoted the Belt and Road policy, the people began to pay extensive attention to western China and to examine the once glorious culture of the Silk Road with a fresh perspective. Cultural development of the grottoes has been carried out to meet the growing spiritual and cultural needs of the people. However, there is almost a gap in the study of cultural creation in the Kizil Grottoes, and how to highlight its characteristics in the light of the current development of the times is an urgent problem to be solved in the development of cultural creation in the Kizil Grottoes at present.

The Kizil Grottoes have a unique cultural connotation and artistic value due to their geographical, ethnic and religious beliefs. Therefore, the development of creative products for the Kizil Grottoes will help promote the local ethnic culture of the Kizil Grottoes, drive the development of the tourism economy in Xinjiang, and make more people understand the story behind the Kizil Grottoes and show the life style of the ancient country of Guiz.

## **1.2 Research Methodology**

Literature research method: The authors searched domestic literature platforms using the keywords "Kizil Caves, qiuqi music and dance, image of kagura, and cave culture and creation" to organize and classify the best papers and works collected. The authors read 23 master's theses and 2 doctoral theses on the Kizil Grottoes, as well as a number of periodicals and books, and compiled literature on the Kizil Grottoes' image of music and cave creation, categorized them, and analyzed the artistic characteristics, academic value, and innovation of the Kizil Grottoes by means of thesis markers.

Comparative analysis method: The authors analyze the better-developed grotto cultural and creative products through a survey, research and sort out their development and design models, compare and explore the special features of the Kizil Grottoes, compare and analyze the differences between the Kizil Grottoes and other caves, and seize this as the basis for designing products to explore the design of cultural and creative products.

## **1.3 Research purpose and significance (innovation point)**

History and culture are the bloodline of a nation and an important factor in passing on the national spirit. The art of the Kizil Caves is an artistic treasure of the Chinese nation and even of human civilization, and is an integral part of Chinese culture.

This paper selects the image of the Kizil Grottoes as a product design study. According to domestic and international research, this topic is novel and there is still a gap in previous research, so it is one of the innovations of this paper to explore the image of the Kizil Grottoes as a product design in the form of cultural creation, so that the sunken culture of a thousand years can be shown again.

## **2. Overview of the Culture and Art of the Kizil Grottoes**

### **2.1 Overview of the Kizil Grottoes**

Kizil Grottoes were excavated on the cliffs at the southern foot of Mount Mingya Dag in Baicheng County, Xinjiang, and were built in the 3rd century AD, more than 200 years before the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang,

the earliest surviving Buddhist cave complex in Xinjiang, the largest in scale, the richest in cave types, and widely influenced by its unique cave form and fresco style, making it one of the most important Buddhist sites on the Silk Road. As seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Statue of Kumarajiva (c. 334-313 BC).

## 2.2 The cultural intersection of the Kizil Grottoes

Xinjiang is at the center of Asia and Europe, where the peoples and cultures of the East and West converge. Mr. Ji Xianlin once said that this is the only place in the world where ancient Indian, Greco-Roman, Persian, and Han and Tang civilizations meet.

The development of the Kizil Caves took place in four periods: the initial, developmental, flourishing, and late periods. The images of music and dance from the beginning to the flourishing period lean toward the Indian style. The dance is characterized by a wealth of gestures and hand gestures, with dancers wearing striking flared pants, feet crossed, looking up tenderly, and bodies in the shape of S-shaped curves. Such as the heavenly palace tricks, the Buddha's degree of good love Qianxiao, etc., these images, whether from the costume, dance, all reveal a strong style of Indian Buddhist music and dance. In the Kizil Grottoes murals also reflect the characteristics of the Chinese culture, the appearance of the dragon pattern in Cave 198 shows that the Chinese culture has penetrated into the qiuci murals, in addition to the reed and zheng are traditional Han musical instruments, also reflected in the qiuci murals.

## 2.3 The art form of the Kizil Grottoes

The fresco art of the Kizil Grottoes can be divided into four periods in terms of time: the initial period, the development period, the prosperous period and the declining period. □ According to the study, Cave 118 of the Kizil Grottoes was the first cave to be built, so caves similar to it were divided together based on the characteristics of the murals in Cave 118. The initial cave from the figure of the cave can be seen in the obvious Gandhara art influence, the figure through the robe, long head, features with the Greek, short and strong form. The style of the murals can be described as bold, brash, and bold, with bold colors and simple but beautiful figures.<sup>[1]</sup>(Yin Xing, 2011)

Not many caves were opened during the development period, but the characteristics of the qiuci style of painting were formed at this time, and localized features can be seen in the figures, most of which have flattened heads, concentrated features, proportionate bodies, and long legs. The use of contrasting colors was enhanced at this time, and the area of red and white increased, thus enhancing the visual contrast. The coloring of the figures also tended to be bold, with red, green and blue skin tones appearing to enhance the visual effect.

In the development period, the standardization of rhombic grid composition was gradually formed, and the content of the story of birth and the story of karma was the main content, while the picture of heavenly palace music and nirvana were increased in the development period, and the subject matter of nirvana was increased, and the heavenly palace music was not only drawn together with Buddha, but also had an independent form, and the use of musical instruments was also greatly enriched.

The painting style of the frescoes in the flourishing period inherited the local traditions developed during the development period, and the figures have been typically qiuqi-ized, and their clothing has begun to be classified by type of occupation, such as warriors and merchants, all of which were drawn from real life. □

As can be seen in Cave 8 and Cave 224, the robe was scraped, reflecting the devotion to Buddhism and the fervor of the worshipers who spared no financial resources, so at this time the frescoes of the worshipers occupy a very large picture of the cave, and because of the prosperity of the famous qiuqi music, the scale of the heavenly palace music reached its peak at this time, for example, the number of musicians in Cave 100 reached 51 bodies.<sup>[2]</sup>( Zhang Li, Gan Tingjian, 2017)

Kizil Grottoes of the decline of the frescoes has been the end of the strong, painting themes in favor of a thousand Buddhas, Buddhism and other Mahayana themes, painting techniques are simple and crude, the use of color is also monotonous without change.

### **3. Analysis of the source change of the image of Kagura**

#### **3.1 Traceability and Analysis of the Image of Kabuki**

The term "kagura" is often found in Chinese sutras, such as the Sutra of the Great Satsanganikanzi translated by Bodhidharma in the Eastern Wei Dynasty, Volume 2: "The infinite hundreds and thousands of sons of heaven, etc., dwelling in the void, make all kinds of kagura, making all kinds of wonderful sounds to offer to the Buddha, raining heavenly clothes, beating all heavenly drums ", reflecting that kagura is mainly for music and dance, but for Buddhism, kagura is not only for entertainment and celebration, but can be used as a contribution and salutation to the Buddha, offering him with kagura. In the translation of the Myoho-enge-kyo Sutra by Hatta-marashi, ten kinds of offerings are listed: "One flower (flower), two incense, three celluloid, four anointing incense, five coating incense, six burning incense, seven increasing coverings and streamers, eight clothes, nine kirtans, and ten palms." The ninth of these offerings is the music, so the music in Buddhism is not to be ignored.<sup>[3]</sup>(Shen Chun, 2015)

The images of Kagura are divided into two categories: one is in the "Buddha's story", which tells the story of Buddha from his birth to his final nirvana, and the other is in the images of celestial beings, which expresses praise and offerings to Buddha, including the two special forms of "Heavenly Palace Kagura" and "Kagura Flying Heaven".

#### **3.2 Arrangement of the musical figures**

The arrangement of the orchestra in the cave murals in the Kizil Thousand Buddha Cave reveals its unique stylistic features, with the central symmetrical arrangement being the most common combination.

The so-called central symmetry is the form of symmetry and balance with the Buddha or Bodhisattva at the center and the priests lined up on either side of it. This form was most commonly used in the early murals of the Kizil Grottoes. They are all subject matter for the heavenly palace of music and celestial figures. For example, in the 4th century AD, in the main room of Cave 76, the picture shows four bands lined up horizontally with Buddha as the center, connecting the top of the scroll into a square shape, and the diagonals on the inside of the square shape are lined up on both sides with Buddha as the center.<sup>[4]</sup>(Zhonggao, 2009)The image of the orchestra, which is well preserved, shows that the orchestra centered on the Buddha is not only symmetrical in number, but also balanced in terms of the music played, giving a sense of balance.As seen in Figure 2.



In addition, the celestial palace orchestra in Cave 38 of the Kizil Thousand Buddha Cave, which is shown in a single line, is subdivided into two groups of one male and one female, with one black and one white skin color. A similar arrangement of two men and one woman in a subdivided group also appears in the Kizil Cave 100 "Kagura celestial figure" and in the Cave 181 "Folklore" orchestra.<sup>[5]</sup> (Yang Chengbin, 2015)



Figure 2 Cave paintings in Kizil Thousand Buddha Cave.

### 3.3 Characteristics of the color scheme of the Kizil Grottoes for the image of the kagura

The south and north walls of the main room of Cave 38 of the Kizil Grottoes are painted with the picture of the Heavenly Palace of Music. As seen in Figure 3. The niches are lined with images of celestial beings playing music and dancing. The dark and light skin tones of these celestial figures present a contrasting effect with the head light and the cooler tones at the background. <sup>[6]</sup>(Huo Xuchu), 2005 The front side of the bar wall motif is black-brown at the top and green at the bottom. The upper and lower layers that are recessed are the opposite color of the raised brick surface, with the upper layer being green and the lower layer being black-brown. The upper and lower layers on the sides are blue, serving as a turning articulation. The edge of each brick is outlined with a very narrow white strip, which runs through the entire concave and convex fence wall, making the entire fence wall rich in color variation while maintaining a uniform and coordinated look.

Throughout the qiuci cave murals in the representative imitation of the wood structure of the concave and convex color block grouping, it can be found that they mainly use red, blue, green, white four color-based decorative colors, through the regular arrangement of them to constitute an important programmatic expression of the frescoes of this period.



Figure 3 Kizil Grottoes Cave 38.

### 4. The application of the flying patterns of the Kizil Grottoes in cultural and creative products

Through the research on the redesign of the pattern and color of the previous Kagura image, this section will carry out the practical design of the Kagura image in the design of cultural and creative products. The author draws a series of product effects after the secondary design of the Kabuki image for the different aesthetic and emotional needs of the modern youth group for the cultural and creative products. As seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Kabuki Character Design (drawn by the author).

In this design, the image of the Kagura is redesigned from the frescoes, and the color is chosen from a brighter blue-green, with red as an accent, so as to achieve a corresponding fashion acceptance. As seen in Figure 5.



Figure 5 Cultural and Creative Products Periphery (Drawn by the author).

## 5. Conclusion

The Kizil Grottoes are a milestone in the introduction of Buddhism to the Central Plains and a very special part of Buddhist art. In the Kizil Grottoes, one can clearly see the shadow of the fusion of Western foreign culture with the local culture of the Western region, drawing inspiration from the daily life of the people of ancient Kuz, and the Kuzi music and dance, which have now dissipated, can only be felt again from the Kizil Grottoes murals. By understanding and studying the Kizil Grottoes and applying the design to the cultural and creative products, it reflects the spark of collision between tradition and innovation, and brings consumers a new visual enjoyment and aesthetic experience through the expression of exotic patterns.

However, the integration of ancient grotto culture into modern cultural and creative product design can not be a simple addition, but rather in-depth understanding of the basis of the integration of its secondary design, drawing inspiration from the grotto murals, combined with modern technology and aesthetic means of structural reorganization, so that the two are perfectly combined, in order to design a sense of the times and the national characteristics, cultural connotations of the modern cultural and creative products, in order to better meet the emotional needs of consumers. It is only through the perfect combination of the two that modern cultural and creative products with a sense of the times, national characteristics and cultural connotations can be designed to better satisfy the emotional needs of consumers and realize the cultural inheritance of the art of Kizil Caves.

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