

## Research on Animal Images in Ancient Chinese Buddhist Architecture

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**Abstract:** Animal images in ancient Chinese Buddhist architecture include some patterns from India, some based on the combination of Chinese philosophy and Buddhism, and some are variations of Indian Buddhist animal images in China. However, most of these images represent auspiciousness and blessing, compassion and respect for all forms of life, including animals' life. In Buddhism, life is the core of the interpretation of Buddhist doctrines. Only when there is life, there will be a turning point and cause and effect of fate. For Buddhism, no matter where you come from, and your life form is different, you all need to be baptized by Buddhism to purify the secular body, and pay attention to the cause and effect of reincarnation, which is also shown in the patterns of animals, which can be understood as a metaphor for life symbol. It also includes fables about animals, which are endowed with profound connotation and law. This has become an effective way for all living beings of Buddhist doctrine.

### 1. Introduction

Since the introduction of Buddhism into China before and after the A.D., the Chinese culture contains the “ghost” saying that this is an image of Buddhism's causal reincarnation, and the separation of this image is the object image, that is, through special symbols and Architectural patterns symbolize a kind of doctrine and culture. Obviously, the animal images of architecture in ancient Chinese Buddhism are not without meaning, but represent an important content of Buddhist heritage.

### 2. The Significance of Animal Images in Architecture in Ancient Chinese Buddhism

Ancient Buddhist architecture is an important carrier of ancient cultural spirit. Through the ancient Buddhist architecture, we can understand profound connotations of Buddhist culture. In a sense, they are the “historical memory symbol” and “the witness of the development of regional Buddhist culture” of an area, witnessing the vicissitude of this land and the development of Buddhism. How long the history of an ancient Buddhist building is? Or what the patterns represent? what are the inherent cultural connotations and the historical traces of thousands of years? These animal patterns representing Buddhist culture and thoughts are irreplaceable. On the contrary, what is the appearance of a modern Buddhist building? If there is no internal historical relics, its cultural connotation will certainly not reach the same height as the ancient Buddhist architectures. The real significance and value of ancient Buddhist architecture lies in recording history, displaying culture and carrying soul. The historical factors of ancient Buddhist architecture have been fully inherited and expressed, which is the practical significance of the protection of ancient Buddhist buildings. When appreciating the ancient Buddhist architecture, we should not only pay attention to its aesthetic characteristics, but also see its internal cultural charm through the brick walls, patterns and shapes of ancient Buddhist buildings.

Different animal images represent different Buddhist culture and have different implication. This is because since the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Buddhism needs to express different life metaphors by animal patterns, which is also a part of the witness of causal links. In ancient Buddhism, people and animals are both in the samsara ecosystem. In addition, we can see in the Solemn Pictures of the Buddhist Paradise that all things can become Buddhas, and the Buddha is presented in human form. It also shows different stages of animal patterns mean different course of

life evolution, which is a symbol of life form and a blessing and encouragement for different living organism. This kind of artistic expression is very advanced. In the Tang Dynasty, there were a large number of animal patterns in buildings to explain the cultivation at different levels of Buddhism. At the same time, it also told the world that the doctrine and evolution of Buddhism had a ladder and needed constant self-realization.

### **3. The Implication of Animal Images in Ancient Chinese Buddhist Architecture**

In Buddhist scriptures, dragon is one of the eight parts of Buddhism guardian. According to Biblical records, there are four types of Dragons: Jarāyuja, Aṇḍaja, Samsvedaja and Upapāduka. The leader of the dragon clan is called the Dragon King. They have great power and become guardians of the Buddha. There is also a kind of “illegal Dragon King”, who disobeys the law and does not respect Bodhisattva, often eats forbidden fruit and is preyed by Caruro. Among all these Dragon Kings, the fifth and eighth Dragon Kings are particularly famous. Of course, this also illustrates an image, which represents Chinese traditional culture. Elephant, as a symbol of nobility in ancient Buddhism, is often used to describe the behavior of Buddha king. According to the Mahāprajāpāramitā-sūtra, there are 80 kinds of good Buddhas, such as Elephant King, Goose King and Lion King. According to the Aparimitayur sutra, Bodhisattvas are still as good at regulating and subduing as kings. The elephant has great power, which shows that the Dharma can bear the burden. If there is no trouble or impurity, the elephant will be white. The white elephant's six teeth are six degrees, and four feet have four meanings.[1]

In ancient Buddhism, lions represent fearlessness and greatness. According to the Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom, the lion is fearless among quadrupeds and can subdue everything. The Buddha, known as the lion of man, conquered all fearlessness in 96 external ways. “Baoyu sutra” lists ten good methods of Bodhisattva, one of which is a metaphor of the Lion King. The ox is the symbol of the noble animal in Buddhism, which has high prestige and virtue. In these 80 kinds of beauty, one kind is “the Ox King, step up to the top”. Among the Buddha's virtues, they use “the Ox King of man” to praise the Buddha's virtue. And the big white ox cart is used to describe the greatness of Buddha's riding. Zen also uses ox to describe the hearts of all living beings. Ten cattle paintings and cattle herding theme represent ten areas of practice. Among the 32 phases of horse and Buddha, there is one called kos/opagata-vasti-guhya. This friendship represents that the Buddhist scriptures transcend the desires of men and women, and now shows the image of kos/opagata-vasti-guhya. In Buddhist scriptures, Malay is used to describe the thoughts of all living creatures. It refers to wild horses running with others. In the classics, horses are used to compare the four basic mechanisms of all living things. In Zaha Sutra, four kinds of horses are listed and compared with the four levels of people's understanding of Tao. In Zen, donkeys are used to refer to people who have bad roots. Camel, in the classic, is used to mean that the soul is conquered or represents the dispersion of the soul. It means that the soul chasing the outside world cannot settle down in one place. In the Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom, there is a saying that “a person who is upset is evil. Without hooks, drunken elephants will trample on Huachi; camels will overturn their burden.” In Buddhist scriptures, ram is used to describe ordinary people who do not understand the law and practice of the world but are addicted to the three poisons of “greed, anger and infatuation” and five desires of “sights, sounds, smells, taste, and touch” [2]. In the Dharma Chinese Sutra, the ram cart is used to describe sound, hearing and horse riding. In Buddhism, pigs represent the stupidity of life and dogs represent two poisons of greed and hatred. In the case of Zen, cats are used to describe people who know nothing about Buddhism. The white horse and the slave of black cats is a kind of slave of civet. Buddhist scriptures use black and white mice to describe time and life. It's hard to grasp monkeys with frivolous thinking and irritability. In the classics, they are compared to the illusion of ordinary people. Ape is a metaphor of human thinking, which means that all living things cannot stop thinking like apes. Deer, according to the story of Vinaya, Buddha used to be the king of deer. In order to save the deer from death, he swore at the end of his life. When he reaches the highest level, all deer can get rid of the net of life. The Buddhist Scripture uses golden tortoise as a metaphor, that is, life and death is the nirvana of Buddha nature. It is said that

the Buddha's function is to swim in the nirvana sea, just like the turtle guarding the head and tail and four feet. Hiding heads means that all creatures can see color from the root of their eyes. It won't be hurt by all the colored dust.

#### **4. Protection of Animal Images in Ancient Chinese Buddhist Architecture**

From the above introduction, we can see that animals play a very important role in Buddhism. It is the universe that is full of these different life forms. They interact and coexist to create this infinite illusory Dharma Realm. The classification and comparison of life forms in Buddhism is to explain the fact of karma and the reality of life existence. In fact, all forms of life are equal in nature. From the perspective of protection, the following points are particularly important.

##### **4.1 The Connotation and Culture of Ancient Buddhist Architecture Need to Be Excavated**

The protection of animal images in ancient Buddhist architecture needs to be understood and deeply excavated from the perspective of connotation and culture. This is because animals in ancient Buddhist buildings represent different historical and cultural values, that is to say, different cultural carriers represent different protection measures. For example, ancient elephants represent nobility in Buddhist doctrines, so we should not lose them in the protection work. This is the most basic respect for Buddhism. Therefore, it is necessary to excavate protectively according to the historical value and the meaning of animal images themselves.

##### **4.2 The Interpretation of Animal Images in Ancient Buddhist Architecture Should Be Strengthened**

Judging from the current situation of most ancient buildings protection, it is often that the interpretation of animal images in ancient buildings is not clear enough, especially in the preservation of these images, there is no interpretation of ancient architectural animal images, only an introduction of appellation, which is obviously the lack of protection work. Evidently, from the perspective of protection, it is not the integrity of animal images, but to protect the culture from another perspective is the key point. Therefore, from this point of view, the protection of ancient architectural animal images must be cut in from the perspective of history and culture. Only in this way can we better serve the society.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The architectural patterns in ancient Chinese Buddhism are not only originated from Indian Buddhism, but also influenced by Chinese traditional culture. We can see the Chinese traditional culture from the connotations of animals. This is the expression of Chinese Buddhism itself, and also the value of human self-realization in ancient social civilization.

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