

# The Basic Characteristics of Buddhist Temples in Leizhou Peninsula

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**Abstract:** The Buddhist temples in Leizhou peninsula which is located in the southernmost tip of mainland China, has unique features due to the special human geography. The architectural features show the peninsula oceanic nature; The temples own ethnic characteristics in the process of development and evolution; In terms of communication, the temples received a lot of literati which makes the characteristic of communication and spread wide; Integration and interactivity are shown in the belief system; The temples are educational in cultural function.

## 1. The Characteristic of Peninsula Oceanic Nature

The peninsula is surrounded by sea on three sides and faces land on one side, which is typical peninsula maritime nature. Meanwhile, the temples there adapted to local condition and formed their peninsula oceanic characteristic. Influenced by the geological tectonic movement and the change of land and sea, the Leiqiong stratum once had many volcanic eruptions, resulting in more distribution of volcanic geology on the peninsula and the formation of volcanic landforms such as granite, basalt and migmatite. Shurangama Temple locates at Lake Light Rock near the crater, which belongs to basalt landform.

The main hall of Shurangama Temple is the most amazing. It is the only one in the world built in natural volcanic rock. Shurangama Temple, located at Lake Light rock, was built in Sui Dynasty. At that time, Liliao people built a temple in the name of Linghuihou from soil. During the Jingkang reign (1126-1127), the end of the Northern Song Dynasty, the monk Cong Sun (Master Cong) studied Zen here and named it Baiyun Temple. Many repairs have been made since then. In the Qing Dynasty, it was renamed Shurangama Temple.

Lake Light Rock itself is a world geopark, a national 4A level tourist attraction, a national scenic spot and a national youth science base. According to the research, the lake of Lake Light Rock is formed by the volcano after several eruptions and the groundwater. It is at least 200,000 years of history. Geologically it's called maar lake. There are many legends and mysteries around the lake, which increase its mystery and infinite charm. The typical rocky and volcanic landforms are formed by the unique geological evolution and climate of the peninsula. Near the Sishan rock, there are three characters "Lake Light Rock" carved on the rock, which was written in the third year of Jianyan reign (1129) by Gang Li, the Song Dynasty prime minister who was demoted to Leizhou. Inside and outside Shurangama Temple, there are 16 inscriptions of famous people in past dynasties. In 1985, Shurangama Temple held a lake light poetry gallery, collecting poems written by ancient and modern celebrities, such as: *In Memory of Master Cong* by Gang Li, the prime minister of Song Dynasty; handwritings and poems written by Mou Zeng, the prefect of Yuan Dynasty and Zhenyu Chen, the national supervisory official of Ming Dynasty; *In Memory of Lake Light Rock* by Engui Huang, the magistrate of Qing Dynasty; *The Travel Note of Lake Light Rock* by the magistrate Banzhu Hong; *The Trip of Lake Light Rock* by Shuang Zou; *The Study of Lake Light Rock Built in Tang Dynasty* by Guoyong Song; In modern times, there are *The Grace of Lake Light Rock* by Moruo Guo and *Lake Light Rock* by Biwu Dong.

In addition to Shurangama Temple of Lake Light Rock and Leizhou Baolin Zen Temple, the temples under construction are Fulin Zen Temple of Nanshan in Dahan Sandun scenic spot of Xuwen county and the Guanyin temple of Foshan hill in Lianjiang. The proposed construction is Southern three islands Guanyin temple which is the largest jungle Guanyin temple in western Guangdong. These temples have unique local characteristics due to their combination of unique

peninsula and oceanic resources.

## 2. The Ethnic Characteristic

Kaiyuan Temple that mentioned above was the Buddhist temple with a stone pagoda in its initial stage, which itself was the result of sinicization. In the spread of Buddhism in India, the function of the pagoda is to offer Buddhist relics, scriptures or dharma objects. Its initial form is alms bowl type, then gradually evolved into the pavilion type, and then derived into the serried roof type tower. The material also evolves from the early stone pagodas, gradually into wooden pagodas, brick pagodas, even mixed type pagodas. With the emergence and expansion of Buddhist temples, pagodas were gradually replaced by pavilions and towers, and their functions, styles and meanings were changed as well. This is a concrete manifestation of the sinicization and nationalization of Buddhism and temples in the process of dissemination and development. The stone pagoda of kaiyuan Temple in its early stage gradually disappeared with the changes of time. Then the reconstruction of Nine-tier Qixiu Tower, used to be known as the Yuankui Tower, Qixiu Tower, Sanyuan Qixiu Tower, Goose Tower and Wenbi Peak. Nine is the largest Yang number in *The Book of Changes*. Yuankui means the first place. Qixiu means good wishes. Sanyuan means good omen in imperial examinations. The purpose of building this pagoda in Ming dynasty was not to revitalize Buddhism, because the local imperial examination condition was not good, so the original intention of building this pagoda was to revitalize the examination luck and promote the condition. The theoretical basis of doing so is the relationship between humanity and terrain, which of course belongs to the category of geomancy and geomorphology. The pagoda was built by local officials on the advice of two students, Dong Chen and Jin Chen. The cost of building the pagoda came from the salaries of the officials on the one hand, and from the contributions of the local gentry and the people on the other. Bao Ouyang built the pagoda for the hope of Leizhou people. He finally realized the meaning of building the pagoda, that is, prosperity of luck, prosperity of humanity and culture, clean politics, great changes of social morality. Kaiyuan Temple, established in Tang Dynasty, had been replaced by Nine-tier Qixiu Pagoda in Ming Dynasty. This pagoda is completely the product of Chinese culture. The establishment, construction, meaning of the pagoda are completely labeled with the ethnic brand.

Coincidentally, Zhenlong Temple which is mentioned above, still has obvious ethnic characteristics reflected in its background, construction process and construction significance. Zhenlong Temple was founded solely to solve the problem of flood, which can be seen from its name. “long” here means dragon in the water. From *The Inscription of Zhenlong Temple* written by Wei Ling, it can be seen that the purpose of building this temple is to make the local people outstanding and talented, and to gather literati together. Zhen Long and Jianwang Xu donated for Zhenlong Temple. The followers from the South China Sea donated the iron bell. The magistrate of the county Mengliu Er also helped donate for the temple. All of these reflect the folk and the official power contribution to the temple. In Qing Dynasty, rebuilding Zhenlong Temple was once again put on the agenda because it was old and dilapidated, which brought inconvenience to the official sacrificial ceremony and people's worship. Therefore, the magistrates, such as Shengzu Sun, Baozhong Yu and Erkang Nie, rebuilt or renamed Zhenlong Temple and made it take on a new look. The significance of building a temple is embodied in the spiritual and material aspects, especially in the spiritual aspect. The rebuilding of Zhenlong Temple, from the spiritual level, can bring people a good harvest, no disaster, good weather and good grain. In addition, as the magistrate, Baozhong Yu helped rebuild the temple, the behavior of which belongs to the merits and virtues. It was seen as the obedience of god's will and the god would help the people there. Therefore, the whole building process of Zhenlong Temple is the process that Buddhism and the temple gradually entered the belief of the people, and it is also the process of the nationalization of Buddhism and temples.

## 3. The Characteristic of wide communication and spread

Leizhou peninsula in Tang Dynasty had not been greatly developed. After Song Dynasty, Leizhou peninsula was greatly developed. However, compared with the mainland, it is still far away

from the political center, and its economic culture cannot compare with the mainland. Under the severe situation of party faction in Song Dynasty, many literati were relegated to this place, such as Zhun Kou, Gang Li, Shi Su, Zhe Su, Guan Qin, Jing Cai and so on. The reason why Buddhist temples became the place for literati to stay since Song Dynasty is because of the profound Buddhist attainment of literati in Song Dynasty and their special state of mind. Buddhist temples are suitable for spiritual cultivation. For the bureaucrats and literati who were banished thousands of miles away, temples were the places for them to heal their wounded souls. Therefore, the Buddhist temples were not only places for monks to practice, places for ordinary people to worship and relax, but also places for literati and bureaucrats to rest and cultivate. All of these makes temples in Leizhou peninsula has the characteristic of wide communication and spread. Because of these literati in Song Dynasty, the Buddhist temples of Leizhou peninsula became important places for the continuous inscription and visit by the later generations, and became an important platform for cultural transmission and exchange, and an important topic for in-depth exploration and research in the construction of regional culture. The characteristic of Buddhist temples in Leizhou peninsula were most obvious in Song Dynasty. In Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, and even in the period of Republic of China, this characteristic had a deep impact on the minds of local bureaucrats and literati. The construction of this characteristic of the Buddhist temples in Leizhou peninsula is also related to the visit of monks. Monk Jianzhen has set foot on the Leizhou peninsula, and caused a certain impact there. Moreover, in Ming Dynasty, Master Hanshan, who was banished to Leizhou peninsula, preached dharma, and carried forward the Buddhist spirit of compassion and deliverance which enriched and developed the connotation of the characteristic of the temples in Leizhou peninsula.

#### 4. The Characteristic of Integration and interactivity

In Leizhou peninsula, Buddhism is not only integrated with Taoism and Confucianism, but also with various religious beliefs. The author once found in the home of an ordinary people that they offered sacrifices to Guan Gong, Guanyin and their ancestors at the same time during festivals. This phenomenon is very common in Leizhou peninsula. On the discussion of Confucianism and Buddhism, there was once a dispute between Shouqisheng and Cungusheng. When they argued endlessly, they sought help from the lay Buddhist Wu Wu, who said:

“I heard that you two are arguing for the similarities and differences between Buddhism and Confucianism. I think you won’t be able to know the differences if you don’t know the similarities. At the same time, if you don’t know the differences, you won’t be able to know the similarities.... Hence, from this point of view, are there similarities in differences? Are there differences in similarities? There must be someone who can tell it.”<sup>[1]</sup>”

It is a difficult problem to tell the similarities and differences between Confucianism and Buddhism. The lay Buddhist Wu Wu is the great scholar in Lingnan area Changqi Chen. He delved into this question, but he did not give a clear answer to what the similarities and differences were. However, this discussion shows that in Leizhou peninsula, the distinction between Confucianism and Buddhism has come into the view of scholars.

Not only that, Taoist Ji Zhang once participated in the construction of Pu’an Hall, which is a manifestation of the integration of Buddhism and Taoism. According to the *Records of Affiliated Annals*, Volume 22 of *Leizhou Annals* compiled by Bao Ouyang in Ming Dynasty, during the years of Yuan Taiding, three buddhas in Pu’an Hall were moved into Tianning Temple, eighteen arhats were moved to Yuantong Treasure Pavilion<sup>[2]</sup>. The evolution of Fubo nunnery shows the connection between folk beliefs and Buddhism and Catholicism. According to *Haikang County Records* republished in the Republic of China era, “Fubo nunnery, located in the south of Heng street in Dongmen, has been recorded before. People raised fund to rebuild it in the early Guangxu era. In the first year of Xuantong, because of the crime case, Guang shou Qin, the magistrate, nationalized it and sold it to the French clergy who built Lude Church.”<sup>[3]</sup>”

## 5. The Characteristic of Education

Leizhou peninsula was developed late and its culture was backward. It was not until Song Dynasty that the school was established. However, school education in Leizhou was not developed until Ming Dynasty. Buddhist temples throughout urban and rural areas “are not only places for practicing meditation and seeking dharma, but also places for Confucian students to study Buddhism and practice Buddhism, and to talk about the philosophy of mind. In fact, they are places for students to study. They have the function of school education.<sup>[4]</sup>” Take Shurangama Temple as an example. It was a place for Yingyan Ji to read in Song Dynasty. Then it became a place for people to amuse. In Qing Dynasty, Shurangama Temple held the Lake Light library and social studies, which became an important place for scholars to discuss knowledge and spread Confucian education. In addition, the prominent educational characteristics of Buddhist temples in Leizhou peninsula are also related to the campaign of destroying temples and building schools instead held by Xiao Wei in Ming dynasty. This campaign caused negative impacts on Buddhism but improved the development of its education. The formation of the educational function of temples also has social reasons. Such as before and after the Anti-Japanese War, Haikang Normal College and Leizhou Normal College once sent teachers and students to Tianning Temple. In today's Xiashan district of Zhanjiang, there is also a patriotic education base - Shanglin Temple. Ting Lin wrote an article called “Praise the Patriotic Spirit of Shanglin Temple”, which was inscribed in the temple<sup>[5]</sup>. On June 24, 2011, the opening ceremony of the first batch of national religious patriotic education bases was held in Maoshan Taoist Temple of Jurong in Jiangsu province. There are 37 patriotism education bases in the first batch of the religious circle in China, among which Shanglin Temple of Zhanjiang in Guangdong province, is one of them. This is also the only one patriotism education base of the religious circle at that time in Guangdong province.

## 6. Conclusion

In the historical development of the Buddhist temples in Leizhou peninsula, it shows obvious regional and epochal characteristics. Its distribution and construction must be based on the local geographical terrain, and combined with the local political, economic, cultural, customs and beliefs. From the perspective of the development of times, the construction of Buddhist temples is also changing with the rise and fall of the spread of Buddhism. It is the product of the sinicization of Buddhism and the specific microcosm of the development of Chinese Buddhism. However, the spread of Buddhism in any place will not be universal, it has a personality. The same is true of the development of Buddhist temples in Leizhou peninsula, whose construction fully reflects the characteristics of the peninsula and the ocean. Its development often relies on the power of folk beliefs, which indicates that Buddhism is flourishing and has a solid foundation in the spread of scholars, ordinary people and local bureaucrats. The ethnic characteristic of the peninsula temples fully demonstrate that Buddhism should be fully integrated with local customs, folk conditions, habits and languages in the process of communication. Of course, this is necessary for the sinicization of Buddhism and the inevitable requirement of the development and survival of Buddhism. The characteristic of wide communication and spread of the temples in the peninsula is closely related to its geographic position. Leizhou peninsula is far from the central government and it locates in the southmost of the mainland which makes it the only way to pass between inland and Hainan island. What's more, it is an important destination for exiled bureaucrats. The characteristic of integration and interactivity of peninsula temples reflects the specific form of integration of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in Leizhou peninsula. It also reflects the coping strategies for their own development due to the imbalanced development. It is the responsibility and obligation that Buddhism undertakes in fulfilling the functions of making offerings for the benefit of the living, relieving the common people and serving the society. Peninsula temples also once assumed the educational function, reflecting the characteristics of education, which is the product of the backward school education in Leizhou peninsula and the strengthening of Confucianism education by Xiao Wei and other historical comprehensive factors. It is the extension of realizing the

educational function for Buddhist temples. Because of the close relationship between Leizhou's Buddhist temples and its politics, economy, culture, customs, beliefs, etc., the study of the Buddhist temples in Leizhou peninsula is not only ontology study, but also the historical and cultural study of Leizhou peninsula. It is the inevitable demand of Chinese Buddhist study.

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