

THE VISUAL ART ON BRONZE WORSHIPING OBJECTS AT VIETNAM NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY

Le Thi Thanh

Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism

Email: *lethithanh@dvttdt.edu.vn*

Received: 09/11/2021

Reviewed: 10/11/2021

Revised: 11/11/2021

Accepted: 15/11/2021

Released: 20/11/2021

The visual art on bronze worshiping objects is an element that is closely linked and contributes to the identification of worshiping works of the Vietnamese people. The bronze statue is not only made for simple worship but also elaborately and delicately carved by Vietnamese artisans to form beautiful works of art for the sacred worship space.

Key words: The visual art on worshiping object; bronze; Vietnam National Museum of History.

1. Introduction

Worshiping statues are an indispensable form in any worship space or religious architectural monuments of the Vietnamese people. Statues of worship have many types of sizes and are presented in many different themes or concepts. Worshiped statues include all kinds of statues of gods, buddhas, mandarins, and phoenixes... Through field survey at some typical monuments and study of previous authors' documents, we divided them into 3 groups as follows: group idols, groups of Buddha statues and groups of statues worshiping portraits. These are the groups of statues that we feel are quite unique and bring high aesthetic effect. In addition, there are groups of diamond statues, figurines, and statues of mandarins...

2. A research overview

Worshiping bronze statue is a matter of interest to many researchers of art history, ethnology, art or art religion in the form of monographs, theses, and scientific articles. In

particular, it is important to mention the in-depth research works of the authors: Tran Lam Bien, Chu Quang Tru, Thai Ba Van, Nguyen Quan, Phan Cam Thuong, Ngo Duc Thinh, Trang Thanh Hien ... The research works of the authors have made important contributions to the collection, discovery and study of traditional art elements on bronze worshipping statues of the Vietnamese people. In 2003, Tran Lam Bien published "Worms in the relics of Vietnamese people" published by Culture and Information Publishing House. In 2019, the book was republished by World Publishing House [1]. Tran Lam Bien stated that worshipping objects can be divided into two groups: worshipping objects of identity and non-identity. In particular, the idol worship is the subjective creative image of man, in order to concretize the most innocent way to express the image of the god from the point of view of art. Because people always have a sense of self-centeredness, considering their own image as the standard, most of the sacred gods have human silhouettes. From this suggestion, the paper poses a problem. Research on worshipping statues in order to sketch, evaluate and partly "decode" a number of cultural and visual art elements in the traditional relics of Vietnamese people.

In 2013, the National Museum of History conducted the acceptance of the scientific research topic "*Bronze worshipping objectives under Le-Nguyen Dynasties of the 15th - 20th centuries*" taken by Dinh Phuong Cham, an officer of the Department of Artifacts Management (The National Museum of History). In this study, the author commented: "Worth statue includes all kinds of Buddha statues, God statues, Quan statues... . Each artifact is a complete work of art.

The book "The art of making Buddha statues in Vietnamese temples" by Trang Thanh Hien (2019) published by Hanoi Publishing House, focuses on the art of creating Buddha statues in Vietnamese temples in Northern Vietnam before nineteenth century. In addition, the book also points out a series of Asian Buddhist sculpture art styles and places Vietnamese art in a diverse, rich and brilliant flow to better see the position of Vietnamese sculpture in contributing to a separate line to the common source. This document is quite close to the research content of the article, so the author acquires to get an overview of the art of creating Buddha statues in Vietnamese temples to compare with the research works in this article..

In general, the research works related to the above-mentioned bronze worshipping statues have provided the author with a lot of information, as well as some comments on the characteristics of the religious art form, which are very necessary. necessary and helpful for the author to have a scientific basis, many suggestions to develop new research directions.

However, there has not been any in-depth research on the art of creating images of bronze worship at the Vietnam National Museum of History. Research works related to bronze worshipping statues are only mentioned very limitedly. Therefore, within the framework of this article, the author presents a number of studies on the group of small bronze Buddha statues from the 18th to the 20th century currently kept at the Vietnam National Museum of History.

3. Research methodology

The article uses the following methods:

- Secondary documents: to understand the object of research and find the gaps left by scientists
- Fieldwork: to collect data of research subjects to gain practical values
- Statistics: clarify the issues that need to be proved, such as: the number of worshipping statues; themes, projects, decorative tricks
- Interdisciplinary approach: looking at an idol from many viewpoints.

The main research methods of the article are used to classify and evaluate the plastic details in order to clarify the artistic developments and aesthetic values of bronze statues at Vietnam National Museum of History.

4. Research contents

4.1. Divine statue

There are not many remaining bronze statues of gods, but they are complete works of art, reflecting certain mythological or historical content and have the ability to exist independently in the overall worship space, architectural monuments or in exhibition areas [4, p. 22].

4.1.1. Doc Cuoc Temple (XVIII - XIX centuries)

According to legend, with a long coastline and a large land area, the god Doc Cuoc had to fight the enemy under the water, and the enemy on the shore was proficient in bows and arrows, so he had to divide his forces into two parts. split into two, the mind must be divided in order to skillfully command both armies against the enemy. Later, in memory of the god Doc Cuoc, the people of Sam Son, Thanh Hoa built his temple facing the sea.

The 9cm tall statue of Doc Cuoc, currently kept at the Vietnam National Museum of History, is shaped to stand on a water wave pedestal. Show half body, half face, open eyes, straight nose. God has only his left hand, raised in front of the horse. Hair is shoulder length, falling to the right shoulder. Costumes decorated with water waves and fish scales. Doc Cuoc is a god at the main place of worship at Doc Cuoc temple in Sam Son, Thanh Hoa. According

to the religious ordination in the 14th year of Canh Hung (1738), the god Doc Cuoc named Chu Van Khoan, had talent and virtue, helped the kings to calm down the wars and preserve the territory. He has 7 miracles to cure evil spirits... and was given the four words "Doc Cuoc Son trieu" by the king.



H1. *Doc Cuoc Statue*
(Source: by the author)



H1a. *Doc Cuoc Statue*
(Source: by the author)



H1b. *Doc Cuoc Statue (full body)*
(Source: by the author)



H1c. *Doc Cuoc Statue (shoulder & hand)*
(Source: by the author)

This is the most beautiful statue among the statues of the Vietnam National Museum of History. The pedestal of the statue is stylized from the shape of water waves, a special shape that is very general, both like a normal swirl pattern and the other angle is like a decorative leaf

shape. The statue is dated to the 18th - 19th centuries of the Nguyen Dynasty, some popular decorative patterns are in the shape of leaves, the pattern on the top of the shirt is also rolled up like a wave and also like a falling leaf. This is a very conventional way of dealing with motifs, not an imitation of the Doc Cuoc god riding on the waves, with real folds. This is purely a conventional style, symbolism and fairy tale illustration found very little in this statue.

The power of this god radiates: on the face; the whole body is a stocky mass; Bringing the hand up to the face shows confidence, calm and fearless. In terms of color, red and yellow are very suitable for a god who has experienced war and protects peace, so the artists painting the statue with gold lipstick is to show strength. The hair is red, but the angle is tilted back like a head scarf, creating a contrast to the yellow color, the splendor and strength shows the clear intention of the old artist when describing the statue, how to create the style scarf. ordinary Vietnamese farmers have created closeness.

4.1.2. Statue of Dharma Protector (18th - 19th centuries)

The statue of the Dharma Protector, also known as the Diamond statue, is 23cm high, standing on a pedestal, a serious face, a hat with a pointed top, a strip that covers the shoulders, two hands facing each other, raised in front of the chest to support. take the sword. The statue is wearing armor, the shoulders and front strip are decorated with fish scales, and the feet are wearing high boots. The legal guardian is the protector of the law. Buddhism conceives the Diamond statue as a symbol of the Dharma protector, because the spirit of the deity is pure, with a sense of resolute protection against dangers. The statue both represents the duty of protection and expresses the desire for a good life for Vietnamese people.



H1. *Statue of Dharma Protector*
(Source: by the author)



H1a. *Statue of Dharma Protector (Portrait)*
(Source: by the author)

4.1.3. Statue of Qi Tian Dai Thanh (18th - 19th centuries)

The statue of Qi Thien Dai Thanh is 9cm high, in a posture of stepping on a pseudo-painted pedestal. I wear armor, my head is crowned, my face is delicate. The character is derived from the legend of Hanuman, an Indian monkey hero from the epic Ramyana. Qi Thien Dai Thanh was the main character in “Tay Du ky” and the most famous fantasy character in Chinese literature.



H1. *Statue of Qi Tian Dai Thanh*

(Source: by the author)



H1a. *Statue of Qi Tian Dai Thanh*

(Source: by the author)



H1b. *Statue of Qi Tian Dai Thanh (tilt angle)*

(Source: by the author)



H1c. *Statue of Qi Tian Dai Thanh (portrait)*

(Source: by the author)

From the classification and observation on the group of bronze idols from the 18th - 19th centuries at Vietnam National Museum of History, we can see some technical and artistic features of decoration on bronze statues of this period. That is, bronze artists knew how to mix different alloys to create different types of worshipping images. The mixing technique of this period, on the one hand, absorbed the tradition, and at the same time improved to enrich each statue created.

4.2. Statue of Buddha

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tran Lam Bien stated: "*The statues on the temple, in fact, are meant to talk about the doctrine, and at the same time, they are lessons to teach people to follow Buddhist thought...*" [1, p. 36]. We follow his thoughts to analyze groups of Buddha statues.

4.2.1. Statue of Buddha of Three Times (XVII - XVIII centuries)

The statue is 25.5 cm high, showing the sitting posture of sitting cross-legged on a lotus pedestal, wearing a full robe, covering the chest, tying a knot, with a body ratio equal to three times the height of the head. His head was protruding round. His forehead is wide. His nose is slim. His eyes were half-closed. His portrait is serene with a meditative look, illuminating the inner self. His hair is in a spiral.



H1. *Statue of Buddha of Three Times (straight angle)*

(Source: by the author)



H1a. *Statue of Buddha of Three Times (back angle)*

(Source: by the author)



H1b. *Statue of Buddha of Three Times (tilt angle)*

(Source: by the author)



H1c. *Statue of Buddha of Three Times (Portrait)*

(Source: by the author)

The art of creating a general image is similar to the posture of sitting Buddhas in a triangular layout. The author put the frame into the most general expression, creating the health of the whole statue. With this pose, the balance shown in the statue is that some of the wrinkles of the costume when looking at it (slightly squinting), you can mainly see the outline of the outside due to the light impacting around the statue. the outline of the statue's tassel. Here, the use of shaping strokes on a condensed, non-analytical, and non-trimmed block to contrast with blocks is soft, sometimes rounded, that is, not exploiting detailed blocks but taking fabric folds. rebalanced with the general solid mass of the statue.

Compared with the statues of the same type of China or India, it is possible that the ancient artists also added dense decorative patterns to the entire costume. However, the artist almost ignores those details, so the statue only wears a very simple outfit. The fragmented nature, if you pay close attention, you can see the shoulder spans of the shirt falling down, the hanging rhythm of the lifting arms, the the curves are almost in harmony and are so intertwined that they can't be separated; in the back also shows the perfect harmony. These curves are the operation like the infinity of Buddhist thought, the changing lines in space closely blend together. The blocks and folds of the fabric separate the sleeves, shoulders and bodice, bibs and waistbands... but all the strokes show a close connection and harmony.

The texture of the lotus pedestal is very rough, the petals do not create borders, do not decorate or create a mask to cover the fibers of each petal. This contrast is clearly seen from the top of the statue with the repetition of the bun with dense curls that have been reduced to regular masses; Hidden motifs reappear on the left shoulder of the statue, pulling the eye down to dynamic - static - dynamic rhythms, the opposite side reduces the level of movement, while the right hand is raised to look very dynamic. . Thus, from the lotus pedestal to the rhythm of the whole statue, it is valuable to lead to honor the raised finger and end to direct people's eyes to look at the statue's portrait - the intellectual part of the face.

4.2.2. Statue of Newborn Shakyamuni Buddha (XVII - XVIII centuries)

In my opinion, Shakyamuni Buddha himself, after stepping through the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth lotus flowers and then entering the seventh lotus, the meaning is himself. He used the absolute holiness, purity, and originality of a newborn baby to open the 7 chakras, only such an absolutely pure mind can open the great graves to find the child. path. Thus, after Shakyamuni found the complete path, he said: "Heaven on earth, the only one and only one" [3, p. 76] means "Above is heaven, below is earth, but must obtain the infant ego

(given from heaven), the holy soul has to step through seven lotus flowers in turn to open the seven chakras and return. be with the supreme, find your own self.



H2. *Statue of Newborn Shakyamuni Buddha*
(Source: by the author)



H2a. *Statue of Newborn Shakyamuni Buddha*
(Portrait and the two hands)
(Source: by the author)



H2b. *Statue of Newborn Shakyamuni Buddha (Pedestal and legs)*
(Source: by the author)

In this work, we see that the outstanding space is the void, using the space of 3-dimensional convention, which is still basically a relief. All contours outside the [H2] shape are cut very sharp with no sign of transitions as in circular figures. Here we see, the direction of the dragons are all facing the Buddha. According to legend, when he was born, nine dragons appeared, so the statue was only illustrative as the direction of movement of the dragon objects - the surrounding clouds of the statue. The dignified nature of the statue is based on the general vertical axis of the statue, with the right hand pointing up and the left hand pointing down

showing the positive and negative directions [H2a]. These two dimensions are quite harmonious due to the overall image of the statue. and the position of the face, so we can see that the face falls into the golden ratio ($1/3$: $1/3$ of the top down and $2/3$ of the bottom up). The ancient artisan arranged the Buddha's face in a very high position. standard, and at the same time the rhythm of the dragons converging shows the direction of the rays to focus all on the Buddha portrait. Thus, the author finds it quite appropriate to deal with the idea of "Heaven and Earth, the only one" - focusing on the face - on his ego.

4.2.3. Statue of Guanyin (17th - 18th centuries, Le Trung Hung's reign)

The statue is 23 cm high, showing Guan Yin sitting on a fake painted pedestal, his head covered with a hat, he wears a soft long coat, bare feet, and holds a baby in his hands. This is Guan Yin holding a baby in the fairy tale of Guan Yin very popular in Vietnam. [5, p. 53]



H3. Statue of Guanyin (straight angle)

(Source: by the author)



H3a. Statue of Guanyin (tilt angle)

(Source: by the author)



H3b. Statue of Guan Yin (Portrait of Newborn Buddha)

(Source: by the author)



H3c. Newborn Buddha of Guan Yin

(Source: by the author)

Guan Yin is an image that comes from China, places to worship Guan Yin in some houses and temples, mainly to pray for children, this is different from Quan Am Thi Kinh. The

Vietnamese consider it very convenient to pray for children with Guan Yin. The statue has three faces, looking at the front is also in a triangular layout but not an absolute isosceles triangle.

The face part is not in a dignified and neat position, but a posture with slight vibration, diagonal running position, not perpendicular to the chest but running down, in harmony with the direction of the general hand and the diagonal direction of the lapel. The sleeve has a break with the direction of the arm, the movement of the clothes, the transition of the folds of the fabric looks very flexible. The lower part where the statue comes to the base is the way to let go of the block. The entire general direction of the statue shows the focus on the baby and the portrait of the Buddha. Looking at the angle of tilt [H3, H3a] also, all of them move up, turn and run down to the position of the baby. Thus, we see that the general spirit of the statue is due to the characteristic that the Buddha gave a child, so Quan Am's hand has a shape that does not hold the baby in his lap like all other maternal images, without affection. , caring like a mother with her child but the facial movement does not look down nor malice towards the child, this is clearly a gesture of giving a child. Looking closely at the Buddha's face is very radiant, not scowling or rejecting the child. All the rhythms of the statue thus focus on the baby and at the same time towards the Buddha's face radiating above. Thus, the very good shaping solution has highlighted the characteristics of Guan Yin, a very effective Buddha who always saves infertile families or women in need of children.

4.2.4. Statue of Guan Yin (XVII - XVIII centuries)

The statue is 23 cm high, showing the Buddha in a sitting posture with legs crossed, hands crossed in her lap. I'm wearing a long shirt that creates soft creases. The head is wearing a shawl that hangs down to the shoulder, on the top is a statue of Amitabha. With a gentle face slightly bowed, in the history of Buddhism, Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is considered the most powerful bodhisattva. Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva means always seeing, always hearing all the sufferings of sentient beings and ready to help people.



H4. Tượng Phật Quan Âm chụp trực diện
(Nguồn ảnh tác giả chụp tại kho BTL SVN)



H4a. Tượng Phật Quan Âm (góc nghiêng)
(Nguồn ảnh tác giả chụp)



H4b. *Statue of Guan Yin*
(Source: by the author)



H4c. *Statue of Guan Yin (back angle)*
(Source: by the author)

The general blocks of the statue are also shaped very briefly, not exploiting too much in details. A special thing about this statue is the shoulder ratio, in terms of artistically the shoulder of the statue is quite small, only equivalent to the length of about 1 character's head. Here, we think that the artist wants to emphasize the characteristics of the Vietnamese people (big head) and wants to enhance the intellectual part (also known as the upper part) which is the upper part, and the whole statue wants to focus on into this portrait. Another special thing about the statue is that the artist has spent the change in surface feeling quite clearly to describe Guan Yin Buddha as spending some parts of creating substance: the body of the statue is quite rough, the face is not. to smooth, moderate proportions of the scarf as well as the decoration of the scarf, the hairline is proportionate, repeats very well with the bib on the chest and the tie at the collar of the dress... All is enough to see. The artist has completely calculated to balance the dark and

light levels of the strokes, of the quality, not the clumsy random shaping, the roughness underneath becomes the charm, not the weakness. poor skill of the artist. In general, all of the above shaping elements have brought out the pure Vietnamese beauty, unlike other Chinese or Indian statues of the same type.

5. Discussion

A research article on the art of creating small-sized bronze idols from the 18th to the 20th centuries is now kept at the Vietnam National Museum of History, to see the traditional cultural assimilation and evolution. "Vietnamization" of exogenous elements absorbed from Eastern and Western art and culture in the art of creating Buddha images with decorative, conventional, and symbolic styles are the main ones. Although the size of these bronze statues is usually modest (only a few tens of centimeters), suitable for the ceremony space, but the art of block performance is very detailed, achieving quite high efficiency.

In general, the above-mentioned bronze statues do not have large shapes and sizes, but the structure of blocks and the arrangement of the intervals of tightening, rest, expansion and then repeats that cycle with flexible proportions. The animation has led to the coincidence, the message and the grandeur of the shapes. All of these expressions lead to the creation of beautiful Buddha statues. The way of shaping the real and the unreal, solid and hollow, the maximum moderation of the lines showing the textures, decorative patterns, the highlights flashing very gently through the blocks make the difference, the luxury, perfect, representing the cultural traditions of the Vietnamese people and converging the long-standing beauty of folk worship.

6. Conclusion

The collection of bronze worshipping statues from the 17th century to the 20th century kept at the Vietnam National Museum of History has typical values of material and spiritual culture. This is a precious historical source, reflecting the history of the past. The talent of the Vietnamese feudal bronze-casters at the same time clearly shows the traditional folk art values. The preservation of this bronze collection makes an important contribution to giving an overview. Overview of Buddhist art in the North of Vietnam in the modern period. It must be proud of and respected.

References

- [1]. Tran Lam Bien (2003), *Worshiping objects in Vietnamese relics*, Culture and Information Publishing House.
- [2]. Dinh Phuong Cham (2013), *Le - Nguyen contemporaries of the 15th - 20th centuries at the National History Museum, scientific research project*, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, History Museum Vietnam Publication.
- [3]. Nguyen Du Chi (2003), *Vietnamese Patterns*, Fine Arts Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [4].Trang Thanh Hien (2019), *Art of creating Buddha statues in Vietnamese temples*, Hanoi Publishing House.
- [5]. Phan Cam Thuong (1997), *Vietnamese Ancient Sculpture*, Fine Arts Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [6]. Chu Quang Tru (2001), *Ancient Vietnamese statue with traditional ethnic sculpture*, Fine Arts Publishing House, Hanoi.