



THE AESTHETIC DIMENSION OF YUNNAN CANGYUAN ROCK ART



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THE AESTHETIC DIMENSION OF YUNNAN CANGYUAN ROCK ART



YIJING LI

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of DOCTOR OF ARTS
(D.A. (Arts and Culture Research))

Faculty of Fine Arts, Srinakharinwirot University

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THE DISSERTATION TITLED
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BY
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HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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This research takes the rock paintings of Cangyuan, Yunnan as its subject of study. Based on the framework of art theory and employing various research methods, it systematically explores the aesthetic forms, imagery expression, and artistic dimensions of the Cangyuan rock paintings. Furthermore, it demonstrates the multidimensional value of these paintings from the perspectives of culturology, design studies, and fine arts, while proposing practical suggestions such as semantic decoding of symbols and contemporary applications. This research not only provides a new theoretical framework for the systematic interpretation of the Cangyuan rock paintings but also offers methodological references for the study of prehistoric art and the revitalization of cultural heritage.

Keyword : Cangyuan Rock Art, Paintings, Stylized Language, Symbolic Expression, Artistic Aesthetic Dimension

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This dissertation is dedicated to all those who have illuminated my path. May we all continue to write wonderful stories on the stages of our lives.

YIJING LI

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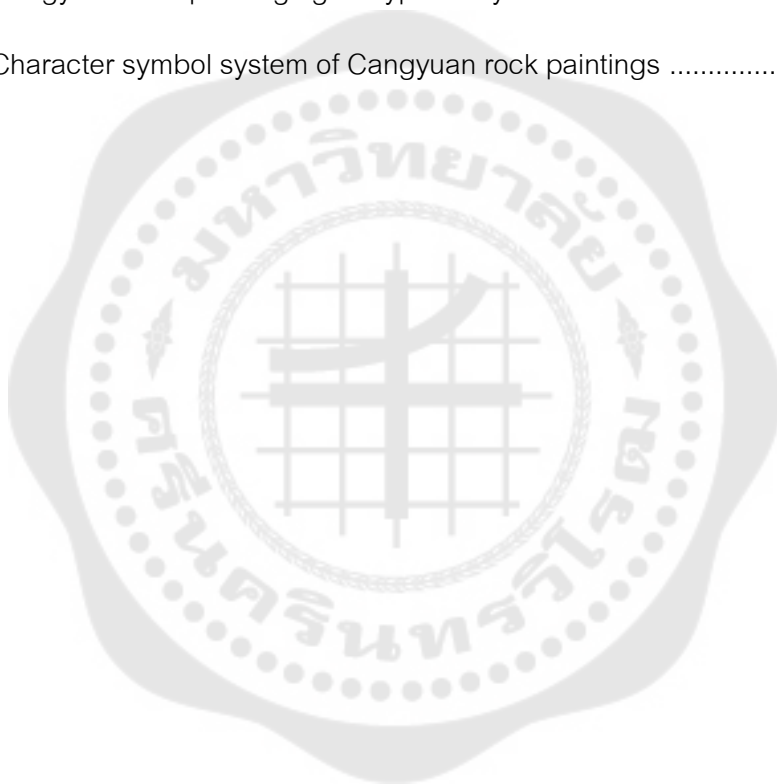
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Emmanuel Anati regards prehistoric rock paintings as a kind of pictorial “writing” in the pre-literate era. Gao Song, a Chinese rock painting scholar, even considers rock paintings (such as those in Helan Mountain and Damai Di) as a matrix system of writing symbols, and thus deciphers a historical archive of China's Xia Dynasty. In this sense, rock paintings are the most primitive illustrations with the functions of pictures and texts, and the most primitive graphic language. They serve as tools for recording the lives of prehistoric humans and conveying human thinking, and also reflect human life emotions, aesthetic cognitions, etc. After the written language gradually became perfect, the pictorial language began to gradually become subordinate to the written language. It was not until the late 18th century that the technological breakthroughs brought about by the Industrial Revolution led to the rise of illustration art in Europe and America, and images once again broke free from the constraints of written language and gradually became independent. In the 20th century, Daniel Bell wrote in his book *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*: “contemporary culture is becoming a visual culture.” An era of image reading has arrived again, and we are completely “living in a culture dominated by images, visual simulacra, facial features, hallucinations, copies, replications, imitations, and fantasies”(Mitchell, 2006). In the present 21st century, the emergence of SORA by Open AI not only further deconstructs our lives filled with images, but also creates a magical world that spans the real and the virtual with images, and will eventually make us live in a space where it is difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehood and where we feel at a loss. The rapid development of the Internet, digital technology, etc. has forced the world to move towards comprehensive contact and integration. This all-round collision, disintegration, and reorganization from the material to the spiritual aspects bring us the increasingly pressing problem of psychological conflicts in the “new image era” that we can hardly deal with.

Where lies the meaning of images? In the face of the image world that surges forward, encompassing art, written language, and all human desires, returning to the source of images and exploring the original functions and meanings of prehistoric rock paintings to provides a foundation for our research and justifies the rationality of academic studies.

1.1.1 Prehistoric Rock Paintings are the Early Spiritual Sustenance of Human Beings

From a global perspective, the images left behind by these prehistoric humans, which are scattered across every corner of Asia, Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania, whether it's the Lascaux in France, Altamira in Spain, Petroglyphs in Ontario, Canada, the Great Basin in California, the United States, or the rock carvings and paintings in Helan Mountain, Jinsha River, Cangyuan and other places in China. Despite being thousands of miles apart from each other, they have transcended space and time, and with a similar modeling form, they have recorded the common life of our human ancestors and expressed the same voice of prehistoric humans.

Prehistoric rock paintings can cross the barriers of space and different ethnic groups, and use a similar or even identical modeling form to express the living conditions of prehistoric humans in different time and space, different regions, and under different languages. This undoubtedly proves that although prehistoric humans had differences in language, ethnicity, and even geographical space, their hearts were connected. They all used the same modeling methods and selected the same colors to express their understanding and worship of life, gods, and the world. As Emmanuel Anati said, the use of red color in prehistoric rock paintings, as well as the similar types of rock painting themes and modeling languages, have become the most universal and unified characteristics of prehistoric rock paintings on various continents. Through rock paintings, this may "enable us to find the basic elements that drive human cognition".(Anati, 2017) Can we also believe that prehistoric rock paintings are a harmonious society of a "community with a shared future for mankind" presented by our human ancestors in another way of thinking, and they to provide us with an artistic path to interpret the "spiritual destiny of humanity"?

1.1.2 It is Necessary for the Society to Strengthen The research of Prehistoric Rock Paintings Based on Art

When humans cast an artistic gaze upon all things in the world, everything can be regarded as art. As a product of prehistoric humans, prehistoric rock paintings are, after all, created through plastic language and have become an indispensable part of all things in this world. Archaeology can reveal the evolutionary relationships of different eras within them, anthropology can discern the role of witchcraft, and art studies naturally also have their own visual channels that focus on spirit and life. However, in terms of art research, the research of rock painting art has not even come close to covering this scope, let alone delving deeply into this field. As Chinese scholar Cheng Jincheng said, rock painting art is “the oldest plastic art”, and precisely in this category, society still lacks a research atmosphere for prehistoric rock paintings based on art studies.

The main directions of world rock painting research are archaeology and anthropology. Later, rock painting studies based on archaeology, anthropology, sociology, and iconography emerged, among which the research achievements of archaeology and anthropology in rock paintings are the most remarkable. Regarding The research of rock painting art, as rock painting research scholar Zhu Yuan said, the research of the aesthetic characteristics of world rock paintings is in a world where primitive religious theories, especially witchcraft theories, prevail, and art theories and aesthetic theories are seriously marginalized. Because anthropologists have removed the aesthetic starting point of the existence of primitive art, primitive art has lost its theoretical foundation of being “art”.

Of course, apart from the influence of the above viewpoints, interpretations like Edouard Lartet’s (1801-1871) explanation of Paleolithic art as “art for art’s sake” became the origin of various interpretations. Edouard Piette (1827-1906) believed that ancient art had a pure aesthetic purpose. Gabriel de Mortillet (1821-1898), one of the founders of 19th-century prehistory in France, also believed that prehistoric art had its own purpose. Edouard Cartailhac (1845-1921) developed the theory of art for art’s sake. He strongly proposed that prehistoric art had very limited cultural, social, educational,

and conceptual functions. This theory recognized the human nature, sensibility, and playful aspects of Paleolithic humans (Anati, 2007). In addition, works such as Ernst Grosse's (1862-1927) *The Origins of Art*, Franz Boas's (1858-1942) *Primitive Art*, and H. Gene Blocker's (1937-2013) *The Philosophy of Primitive Art* all expressed their recognition of primitive art. Like a flag on a lonely island, they have brought a glimmer of light to later scholars engaged in the aesthetic study of primitive art.

In China, although as early as 1500 years ago during the Northern Wei Dynasty, the "commentary on the Waterways Classic" by the geographer Li Daoyuan contained records of rock paintings, books such as "Xuanshi Zhi" by Zhang Du of the Tang Dynasty, "continued Natural History" by Li Shi of the Song Dynasty, "Jisheng of the Territories" by Wang Xiangzhi of the Song Dynasty, "anecdotes of Official Travel" by Zhang Shinan of the Song Dynasty, "the Travel Diaries of Xu Xiake" by Xu Xiake of the Ming Dynasty, and "Records of Mount Wuyi" by Dong Tiangong of the Ming Dynasty all had records of Chinese rock paintings. However, it was not until 1915 that Mr. Huang Zhongqin's investigation of the rock carvings at Xianzitan in Fujian was regarded as the formal start of the research of Chinese rock paintings. After that, the Swede F. Bergman and the German A. H. Francke respectively investigated the rock paintings in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet and other places in China. After 1949, multiple investigation teams organized by the Chinese government conducted in-depth and meticulous investigations of rock paintings in various parts of China. Among them, the works on the iconography of rock paintings by Wang Ningsheng, Gai Shanlin, Li Xiangshi, Tang Huisheng, Chen Zhaofu and others have made outstanding contributions to the collection, collation and promotion of rock paintings.

At present, in the research of the aesthetic value of Chinese rock painting art, there are works such as "the Artistic Schema of Chinese Rock Paintings" by Ning Keping, "the Art of Chinese Rock Paintings" and "On the Cultural Art of the Rock Paintings in the Yin Mountains" by Ban Lan and Feng Shengjun, "On the Art of Western China" by Cheng Jincheng, and "the Aesthetic Dimension of Chinese Rock Paintings" by Zhu Yuan.

1.1.3 The Artistic Value of Cangyuan Rock Paintings Needs to be Developed

Since Wang Ningsheng discovered CANGYUAN ROCK PAINTINGS in 1965 and published “the Discovery and Research of the Cliff Paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan” in 1985, books such as “Yunnan Folk Arts of Ethnic Groups, Volume I” by Peng Xiao, “the Art History of Yunnan” by Li Kunsheng, “the Art of Yunnan Rock Paintings” by Deng Qiyao, “the Art History of Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan” by Li Weiqing, “the Art History of Yunnan” by Li Kunsheng, and “the Art History of Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan” by Li Weiqing have been successively published. In addition, there are academic papers such as “the Diverse Development of Prehistoric Art in Yunnan” by He Aping, “the Art of Ancient Rock Paintings in Yunnan” by Li Weiqing, “a Comparative Study of the Artistic Styles of Rock Paintings in Southwest China” by Sun Yanling, “a Brief Discussion on the Modeling Concepts of the Cliff Paintings in Cangyuan” by Yang Xingji, and “the Artistic Characteristics and Modern Presentation of Cangyuan Rock Paintings” by Yu Fan, and “the Perceptual Schema of Yunnan Rock Paintings”, “the Intellectual Time and Space of Yunnan Rock Paintings”, and “the Narrative Archetype of Yunnan Rock Paintings” by Deng Qiyao. These works have all delved into the artistic research of prehistoric rock paintings in Yunnan from different perspectives and achieved certain results. However, up to now, there has been no comprehensive artistic research specifically on the prehistoric rock paintings in Cangyuan.

Based on the above background and combined with the characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in Yunnan as one of the most representative rock painting groups in China, the author has chosen to conduct an in-depth exploration of them from an artistic perspective:

Firstly, Cangyuan Rock Paintings feature prominent scene narrative characteristics. In the book “the Discovery and Research of the Cliff Paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan” by Wang Ningsheng, it is pointed out that the images at many locations of Cangyuan Rock Paintings are obviously related to each other and they form a complete picture. Through the analysis of the pictures, “the content that the creator wants to express can be traced” (Shanlin, 1993). Gai Shanlin divided the creative

themes of the Yunnan rock paintings (taking the Cangyuanrock paintings as an example) into two categories: primitive religion and realistic life. He summarized five aspects of content, including the situations of simulated witchcraft in Chinese rock paintings, the objects of sacrifice and worship, the records of major events or important ceremonies, the imparting of knowledge, and the records of myths and legends(Shanlin, 1993), which is an expression of the narrative characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. In the article “the Narrative Archetype of Yunnan Rock Paintings”, Deng Qiyao directly summarized the characteristics of the events reflected in the Yunnan rock paintings represented by Cangyuan Rock Paintings through the discussion of the “narrative archetype” and pointed out that until today, the local residents still regard the rock paintings as a pictographic “historical stele” or “encyclopedia”(Qiyao, 2002). The narrative nature of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is concentrated in a large number of large-scale scene compositions, encompassing various events such as living states, survival situations, primitive witchcraft, and sacrificial ceremonies. Events are the motivation and basis for artistic creation. The integrity, significance, and profundity of the events reflected in the prehistoric rock paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan, also clearly reflect the high emotional level of the rock painting creators' understanding of the events.

Secondly, Cangyuan Rock Paintings have prominent compositional features of the primary and secondary relationships of the characters. Precisely because the author has a sense of responsibility and emotion towards the events to be expressed, how to express them has received great attention from the rock painting authors. They have adopted three forms of large, medium, and small in the aspect of character modeling; and three levels of upper, middle, and lower in the identification of character identities, supplemented by appropriate ways of handling daily props. This not only reflects the skilled painting techniques of the authors of Cangyuan Rock Paintings but also demonstrates the authors' superb abilities in modeling, composition, and theme expression.

Thirdly, Cangyuan Rock Paintings have prominent characteristics of stylized language. Most researchers, based on the narrative issues of the rock paintings, have positioned the modeling language of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in representational realism. Combining the data of prehistoric rock paintings at home and abroad, through repeated reading of the image data of 17 locations of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, and adding the impressions obtained from on-site investigations, the author believes that the stylized and patterned imagery modeling language is the characteristic that distinguishes Cangyuan Rock Paintings from the rock paintings in other regions. This kind of painting modeling that uses stylized and patterned language to express life scenes and the state of life reflects the high level of self-awareness and proficiency of the rock painting authors at the design level.

Emanuel Anati said: "Rock painting art is an illustration of humanity's struggle for survival. It reveals labor patterns, economic activities, social practices, aesthetic tendencies, philosophical thoughts, and the relationship between nature and the 'supernatural' environment. Like every type of art form since the existence of art, it has become a means for humans to clearly explain and reflect the world"(Anati, 2019). For Cangyuan Rock Paintings, we also need to clearly understand the way they reflect the world as an art form. To achieve this, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the artistic framework of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

1.2 Research Objectives

1.2.1 To analyze the aesthetic form of Cangyuan Rock Art

This objective focuses on the material foundation of aesthetic appreciation in Cangyuan Rock Art, addressing the formal aspects of beauty and visual perception directly observable at the visual level. It encompasses three key dimensions: subject characteristics, modeling characteristics and structural characteristics, to examine the principles of formal beauty and visual harmony.

1.2.2 To study the imagery expression of Cangyuan Rock Art

This objective examines the thematic expression of Cangyuan rock art as iconic imagery, encompassing four key dimensions: event characteristics, emotional characteristics, spiritual essence, and life characteristics.

1.2.3 To construct the aesthetic dimensions of Cangyuan Rock Art

Building upon the first two research objectives, this study aims to synthesize the findings in order to construct the artistic framework of Cangyuan rock art, while situating it within the broader context of artistic and cultural traditions.

1.3 Research Significance

Among the rock paintings in the southwest China system, Yunnan rock paintings are the oldest, some from 10,540 to 13,580 years old. The main content of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is from 3,000 to 5,000 years old, which is not as long as the Jinsha River rock paintings in Yunnan, but it still ranks the second among the rock paintings in the southwest system. Cangyuan Rock Paintings have more than 1,000 identifiable self-system character modeling, a large number of grand composition full of narrative scenes, and these artistic values are far from being noticed and excavated. Therefore, the architectural exploration of the artistic aesthetic system based on Cangyuan Rock Paintings is of practical significance to the aesthetic academic research of Chinese rock paintings.

1.3.1 Theoretical significance

1.3.1.1 To Provide Ideas for the Art Theory of Rock Art Research

Although the current debate on the artistic attributes of prehistoric rock paintings has basically been calmed down, most of the art related to rock art research is still in the periphery of rock art, only a few began to pay attention to the aesthetic system of rock art, and there is still a long way to go before the formation of a more systematic and standardized art evaluation system. At present, the research focus of most scholars is still on the surface expression of artistic themes, or to talk about the most basic elements such as dots, lines and surfaces rather than pointing to the artistic problems

unique to rock paintings. Therefore, the relevant exploration can effectively improve and enrich the theoretical research of rock painting art problems.

1.3.1.2 To Provide a Paradigm for the Theoretical Research of Art Science on Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Strictly speaking, from the point of view of painting, there is no essential difference between rock paintings and painting, and the evaluation system, methods and standards of painting should also meet the evaluation of prehistoric rock paintings. However, when looking at the research on prehistoric rock paintings worldwide, people still single them out from the painting system. This indicates that prehistoric rock paintings have their own unique characteristics and values. Just as Professor Jean Clottes, a French archaeologist, evaluated the qualification of the Huashan Rock Art in Guangxi as a World Cultural Heritage, he believed that the richness of the meta-system of the Huashan Rock Art is one of the main factors for its qualification. This “meta-system” includes elements such as its “squatting” figure modeling, the spatial composition of the rock paintings, and the forms of expression. The basic theoretical research on the art of Cangyuan Rock Paintings and the proposed art framework based on Cangyuan Rock Paintings undoubtedly to provide methods and models for reference in the aesthetic research of rock painting art.

1.3.2 Practical Significance

1.3.2.1 To Provide an Evaluation Method for the Aesthetic Appreciation of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

For the research of rock painting art until today, we can have access to more such methods as archaeology, anthropology, sociology and later image science methods and theories, such as Anati's typological division of rock painting motifs (themes) based on social and economic production mode, and Jean Clottes' interpretation of rock painting anthropology based on shamanic theory. The Chinese scholar Gai Shanlin's theory of Chinese rock painting is a melting pot of methodology for archaeology, anthropology and sociology. The above methods are to seek some relatively objective circumstantial evidence or direct evidence as far as possible to solve the problems of painting motivation, site selection, theme and social function of rock

paintings, which is far from the art of rock paintings. The research of rock art science in its true sense must focus on the aesthetic appreciation of Cangyuan Rock Paintings themselves and be based on the interpretation of the forms and images of the artworks. The exploration of the methods for analyzing and interpreting the images of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in this thesis undoubtedly has practical guiding significance at the methodological level for the aesthetic evaluation of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

1.3.2.2 To Provide Theoretical Reference for the Art Research of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

The aesthetic attention of Cangyuan Rock Paintings includes not only the interpretation of artistic works, but also the exploration of the basic theories and basic principles of human aesthetic consensus behind the works, which is the most basic problem to be faced as an art ontology. Up to now, the data about research of Cangyuan rock art ontology is very limited, and most of them belong to research from a certain artistic side, lacking a more comprehensive and overall observation. The paper takes the artistic aesthetic architecture of Cangyuan Rock Paintings as the main content of research, which is to supplement and improve the current rock art research, and is a basic theoretical exploration of the rock art research. The research results can to provide an important theoretical reference for the art research of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

1.3.2.3 To Provide Practical Guidance for the Application and Dissemination of the Rock Painting Art in Cangyuan in Various Cultural Fields

The value of art lies in using the informational energy of the artworks themselves to educate and influence society, so as to sublimate the spirit and life of social groups and individuals. As a prehistoric art, Cangyuan Rock Paintings are, after all, far removed from the era we live in. The primitive art information carried by the rock paintings is difficult for people today to understand and perceive. Influenced by the professional backgrounds and academic needs of researchers, the most information we can access about prehistoric rock paintings is the accumulation and display of sociological knowledge. To enable the prehistoric rock painting art to exert its artistic functions, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive study of prehistoric rock paintings

from an artistic perspective. This will facilitate society's understanding of the rock paintings, enable people to feel their artistic charm, and encourage the learning and application of the rock paintings. In this way, it can enrich society's exploration of and consumption demand for culture. From this perspective, this thesis will provide practical guidance for society, the market and other fields.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This thesis takes the rock paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan as the research object. According to factors such as the number of rock painting images at each site, and their clarity and integrity, the scope is limited to the most representative sites, namely No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 15, and 16. The number of images at the remaining sites is relatively small and they are relatively blurry. There are 9 images at Site No. 8, 5 at Site No. 10, only 3 at Site No. 11, 9 at Site No. 12, only 1 at Site No. 13, 11 at Site No. 14, and only 5 at Site No. 17. Therefore, these sites are only for reference.

Regarding the rock painting images, this thesis analyzes them from two major categories of the form and content of plastic arts, specifically from five aspects: subject matter, shape, structure, style, and expression. On the one hand, from the perspective of the viewer, it analyzes the shape, composition, and line processing of the rock paintings to explore the aesthetic issues of the rock paintings. On the other hand, from the perspective of the painter, it restores and interprets the themes and contents, compositions and spaces, symbols and metaphors of the rock paintings, so as to complete a two-way interpretation and analysis of the works.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

1.5.1 Cangyuan Rock Art

Refers to prehistoric rock paintings discovered in Cangyuan County, Yunnan Province, China. These works reflect the lives, beliefs, and culture of ancient ancestors and are regarded as precious cultural heritage and historical testimony.

1.5.2 Paintings

In this context, specifically refers to visual images created by prehistoric humans using natural pigments on rock surfaces. Their primary functions were symbolic communication and decoration, demonstrating intentional creative agency.

1.5.3 Stylized Language

A visual language system that simplifies, exaggerates, or abstracts forms according to cultural conventions. In Cangyuan rock art, it manifests as narrative paradigms actively constructed through geometric forms. This standardized language serves both as a means of information organization and a carrier of cultural memory, achieving the visual transmission of lived experience and spiritual concepts.

1.5.4 Symbolic Expression

The conveyance of beliefs or social functions beyond literal representation through imagery, forms, and composition. Symbols in Cangyuan rock art combine decorative and narrative qualities, reflecting humanity's cognitive instinct for "simplifying complexity"—enhancing information efficiency through stylized coding while maintaining narrative integrity.

1.5.5 Artistic Aesthetic Dimension

A multidimensional framework for understanding and evaluating artworks. This study constructs a five-dimensional aesthetic analysis framework for Cangyuan rock art, encompassing subject matter, modeling, structure, theme, and style. It provides theoretical and methodological support for a comprehensive artistic appraisal of rock art, offering practical approaches for both the appreciation of Cangyuan rock art and artistic creation inspired by it.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research on prehistoric rock paintings by Chinese and foreign academic circles mainly focuses on archaeology, anthropology, and art anthropology. The research on Cangyuan Rock Paintings in Yunnan also basically falls within this category. The materials in this regard are mainly research achievements based on archaeology, anthropology, and art anthropology. Some of the research mainly focuses on the later-emerged rock painting iconography and rock painting studies, which also encompass the research achievements of archaeology, anthropology, and some aspects of art studies. According to the main tendencies of the materials, the research materials related to Cangyuan Rock Paintings in Yunnan are divided into two categories: rock painting iconography (including anthropology and archaeology) and art studies, and a summary on which is presented as follows:

2.1 A Class Iconology Study of Rock Paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan Province

The three monographs, namely *The Discovery and Research of the Cliff Paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan* (Ningsheng, 1985), *The Rock Painting Art of Yunnan* (Qiyao, 2004), and *Lincang Rock Art* (Juan, 2016), basically cover the iconographic materials of the prehistoric rock paintings in Cangyuan.

Professor Wang Ningsheng is one of the pioneers in The research of rock paintings in China, whose book “*The Discovery and Study of the Cliff Paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan*” is China’s first monograph systematically introducing and studying rock paintings. The research on this book started in 1965 and lasted for 20 years, and it was published in 1985. Using various methods such as written records, image tracings, and photography, Professor Wang Ningsheng conducted in-depth collation and research of first-hand materials on the 10 rock painting sites discovered in Cangyuan at that time. He analyzed in detail professional issues such as the location, quantity, themes, characteristics, shapes, and ethnic affiliations of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, and made meticulous records, descriptions, and interpretations of about 800 images.

Professor Wang Ningsheng classified the themes of the rock paintings into seven categories: figures, artifacts, houses, animals, deities and mythical figures, natural objects, symbols, and handprints. The themes of the rock paintings are divided into six categories: hunting, herding, villages, wars, dances, and acrobatics. He believed that the creative purposes and social functions of the Cangyuan cliff paintings were mainly closely related to religious beliefs, reflecting seven kinds of belief activities of the ancestors, such as witchcraft activities, prayers for a good harvest, deity worship, important ceremonies, major events, and mythical legends.

The Art of Yunnan Rock Paintings written by Deng Qiyao involves research in sociology, iconography, art studies and other aspects. This book has established the distribution system of Yunnan rock paintings, collected and traced a large number of image materials of prehistoric rock paintings in Yunnan. It has introduced and analyzed the geographical environment, the situation of indigenous ethnic groups and folk legends of various regions with rock paintings. It is pointed out that the themes of Cangyuan Rock Paintings include animals such as cows, monkeys, bears, elephants, wild boars, birds, dogs, pigs, sheep, etc., as well as tree houses, stilt houses, villages, the sun, the moon, trees, clouds, mountains, roads, bows and arrows, javelins, long shields, sling bullets and some pattern symbols. There are 7 themes in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, such as hunting, war, sacrifice, living in nests, migration, funerals, singing and dancing, etc., with more than 1,200 identifiable figures, and the proportion of human figures reaches 74%. It has summarized and sorted out the animal and human figure patterns of Yunnan rock paintings, as well as the basic types of human figures in Yunnan rock paintings.

The Rock Paintings in Lincang written by Ma Juan comprehensively collects the image materials of the rock paintings within the area of Lincang City, Yunnan Province. Following Wang Ningsheng's research system, it provides a detailed introduction to the locations of the rock painting communities in Lincang, the natural environment where they are located, the historical evolution, and the discovery process. On the basis of collecting and improving the materials of the first ten sites of Cangyuan

Rock Paintings, the book supplements and records the rock painting materials of seven sites, namely Sites 11 to 17. It conducts sociological explorations of the scene details of some group activities in the rock paintings, analyzes the issue of the ethnic affiliation of the rock paintings, briefly analyzes the artistic characteristics of the Lincang rock paintings in terms of painting techniques and colors, and points out the compositional features of the entire Lincang rock painting group, including Cangyuan Rock Paintings: there is no concept of perspective, they feature two-dimensional space representation, outline drawing with flat coloring, and a free layout.

There are also books related to the rock paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan: In the book *Rock Paintings in China* by Gai Shanlin (Shanlin, 1996), Chapter 5 conducts a detailed study of the rock paintings in Southwest China, with a focus on analyzing the rock paintings in places such as Cangyuan, Gengma, Yuanjiang, and Malipo in Yunnan. He subdivides the themes of Cangyuan Rock Paintings into categories such as figures, animals, houses, symbols, handprints, natural objects, utensils, hunting, herding, war, and dance, and classifies them into two major categories: religion and primitive record-keeping, among which the religious category is dominant. Gai Shanlin believes that Cangyuan Rock Paintings were created for religious or secular purposes. They are not only carriers for people to place their life expectations and religious enthusiasm, but also places for sacrificing to the gods and holding ceremonies, and they have the functions of both churches and shrines. In addition, the rock paintings also provide people with a venue for entertainment, are important repositories of the tribal historical culture, and are the center of social life.

The book *Rock Paintings in the South (2)* (Art, 2006) is a collection of rock paintings from Yunnan and Sichuan. Rock paintings from Yunnan account for more than 85%, and those from Cangyuan account for nearly half of them. The rock painting images in Yunnan in this book can be cross-referenced and supplemented with the rock painting data in other works. The book includes Yang Tianyou's article *Rock Art in Yunnan and Sichuan*, which categorizes the themes of rock art in Yunnan into two types: primitive religious beliefs and production and life activities. Primitive religious beliefs are

further divided into nature worship, totem worship, and ancestor worship. The category of life activities includes rituals, hunting, gathering, farming, clothing, head ornaments, housing, and transportation. The book also makes a brief analysis of the representation techniques of rock paintings, and concludes that the rock paintings in Yunnan represented by Cangyuan have the characteristics of planar composition and triangular, rectangular and rod-like shapes.

In his book *On the History of Chinese Rock Paintings*(Yilu, 2015), Huang Yilu based on historical materials of rock paintings and starting from archaeological theories, reinterprets the cultural connections between prehistoric rock paintings and other relics in Yunnan, and groups such as Fuxi, Pangu, the Six Patriarchs' Branches, and the Solar Calendar from the perspective of the grand Chinese culture. He put forward the concept of the Chinese characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, pointing out that the portrayal of the process of ethnic origin and the worship of the bird god in Cangyuan Rock Paintings are precisely manifestations of Chinese characteristics. In his book *The Discovery History of Chinese Rock Paintings*(Zhaofu, 2009), Chen Zhaofu introduced the image content of the first ten sites of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, and described and interpreted some of the images in other chapters.

2.2 Study of Prehistoric Rock Paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan

At present, there is no special Research on the art of rock paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan. Here we sort out some materials for the research of rock paintings in China:

Artistic Schemas of Chinese Rock Paintings, written by Ning Keping(Keping, 1990), is one of the earliest monographs discussing the art of rock paintings. In this book, Chinese rock paintings are classified from the aspects of schemas and styles. It is proposed that “realistic form, symbolic form, and pattern decoration” are the styles of Chinese rock paintings. The book also puts forward the purposes and functions of rock painting creation. It is believed that the art of primitive rock paintings is a symbolic schema of the accumulation of human emotions in the “barbaric era” and the early

artistic creativity of human beings. Both the portrait schemas and the pictures have stylized and fixed rules.

The book *Chinese Rock Art*(Lan & Junsheng, 2008), written by Ban Lan and Feng Junsheng, is the first monograph to systematically study rock art from the perspective of art. Through comparative analysis, this book reveals the common ground between Chinese rock paintings and modern paintings in terms of primitive spiritual demands. The author deeply discusses Chinese rock paintings from the dimensions of social causality (that is, subject connotation, theme expression), modeling evolution and symbolic characteristics, and points out that their modeling style has evolved from early expressionism, abstract in the middle period to patterned and decorative in the later period. The book also analyzes the aesthetic differences between Northern and Southern rock art: Northern rock art often depicts large-scale hunting and herding scenes, using engraving techniques with a grand and robust style, primarily expressive, conveying the impulse of life and violence; Southern rock art focuses on agricultural life, employing painting techniques with a mysterious and gentle style, mainly symbolic, expressing the world's mystery and intelligence. In addition, the book also compares the modeling characteristics of rock paintings in China and the West, emphasizing the contrast between expressionism and realism, subjective and objective time and space, and mind and rationality.

In her book *The Aesthetic Dimension of Chinese Rock Paintings*(Yuan, 2013), Zhu Yuan made the first attempt to construct an aesthetic framework for Chinese rock paintings. The author studies the aesthetic dimensions of Chinese rock paintings from five aspects: configuration elements (points, lines, and planes), imaging characteristics, thematic connotations, ethnic characteristics, and the origin of art. Regarding the first three aspects, the author analyzes the aesthetic features based on the three modeling elements of points, lines, and planes in rock paintings; puts forward the composition laws of simplification, flatness, and depth; and explores the thematic connotations of three types of themes, namely nature, belief, and the soul. As for the last two aspects, the author analyzes the ethnic characteristics of Chinese rock paintings and the origin of

Chinese rock painting art, and tries to find the reasonable artistic elements of Chinese rock paintings through comparisons between Chinese and Western rock paintings, between Chinese rock paintings and traditional Chinese paintings, as well as from the origin of rock paintings.

In the book *History of Chinese Rock Painting Discovery*, Chen Zhaofu proposed that Chinese rock painting has three styles: realism, decoration and symbolism. He pointed out that the composition characteristics of rock paintings include the planar shaping of forms and the planar arrangement of space, as well as the overlapping of pictures, the treatment of space and rhythm. In the decorative style, Chen Zhaofu also raised the problem of image stylization (Zhaofu, 2009). In his book *The research of Chinese Rock Paintings*(Shanlin, 1993), Gai Shanlin incorporated the prehistoric rock paintings in Yunnan into the system of rock paintings in Southwest China. Taking Cangyuan Rock Paintings as an example, he divided their creative themes into two major categories: primitive religion and realistic life depiction. Primitive religion includes nature worship, totem worship, and ancestor worship, while realistic life depiction covers aspects such as hunting, gathering, living, sacrificial ceremonies, and clothing. Gai Shanlin also explored “the aesthetic pursuit in the creation of Chinese rock paintings” and believed that the aesthetic consciousness of Chinese primitive rock paintings had distinct utilitarian and intuitive characteristics. The utilitarian nature is reflected in the close connection between the themes of rock paintings and the economic life of the ancients. For example, the depictions of animals related to economic life such as wild sheep, wild horses, wild oxen, and deer reflect the prehistoric authors’ aesthetic understanding of life and the vitality of life(Shanlin, 1993). In his book *Historical Scrolls on the Rocks — Chinese Rock Paintings*(Shanlin, 1997), Gai Shanlin analyzed the five major functions of Chinese rock paintings, including those in Yunnan: the implementation of imitative witchcraft, objects of sacrifice and worship, records of major events or ceremonies, knowledge transmission, and the recording of myths and legends. He also briefly explained the expressive techniques, painting styles, and

modeling characteristics of Chinese rock paintings, pointing out that rock paintings have two style characteristics: representational realism and non-representational abstraction.

In his book *The Song of the Earth Mother: The Life and Death Motifs of Chinese Painted Pottery and Rock Paintings*(Xiaohui, 2001), Hu Xiaohui takes the belief in the Mother Goddess as the core and interprets the theme of the life spirit of two different art forms, namely painted pottery and rock paintings, from the perspectives of reproductive worship and reproductive witchcraft.

In his article *A Preliminary Exploration of the Modeling Vocabulary of Chinese Rock Paintings*(Changzong, 2000), Cheng Xuguang extracts the modeling vocabulary of Chinese rock paintings such as the linear patterns and stylized frog shapes, and explores the partial influences of these rock painting vocabularies on ancient Chinese characters and modern art. In his article *On the Aesthetic Value of Ancient Rock Paintings*(Bangxiu, 2001), Cheng Xuguang analyzes ancient rock paintings from the perspective of aesthetic standards. He believes that ancient rock paintings are the origin of the linear modeling vocabulary of Chinese paintings. The metallic and stone flavor in several types of plastic arts, including Chinese characters, bronze art, and stone carvings, continues from ancient rock paintings, and they have laid the foundation for the metallic and stone spirit in the modeling of Chinese culture and art.

Cheng Jincheng's book *On the Art of Western China*(Jincheng, 2008) is a specialized study of the eight major categories of plastic arts in Western China. The first two chapters analyze the uniqueness and multi-dimensional values of the art in Western China, and the third chapter is dedicated to the art of rock paintings in the western region. Here, the author summarizes and deduces the ancient history of Western China under the themes and subjects of rock paintings, such as hunting, dancing and sacrificial ceremonies, sexual worship and reproductive worship, and warfare. Regarding rock paintings as the object of exploration of prehistoric art, the author also emphasizes the viewpoints that prehistoric rock paintings express the consciousness of life instincts and are the prototypes of themes(Jincheng, 2008).

In addition, some chapters cover CANGYUAN ROCK PAINTINGS in Yunnan mainly as follows:

Professor Wang Ningsheng's book *The Discovery and Study of the Rock Paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan* proposes seven types of modeling elements and six major themes of the rock paintings in Cangyuan. The realistic modeling style and the composition technique known as "bird's-eye view" (also commonly referred to as "panoramic view") are used, "as if the painter is observing from a high vantage point, unfolding objects onto a flat surface"(Ningsheng, 1985). In Chapter 2, *General Characteristics*, twelve technical and stylistic features of the Cangyuan cliff paintings are put forward, such as monochromatic, not using the shading method, for most of the human and animal figures, the natural curves of the body concealed, etc. However, the analysis by Professor Wang Ningsheng is too simplistic and superficial.

In the book *The Art of Yunnan Rock Paintings* by Deng Qiyao(Qiyao, 2004), the author's article *The Perceptual Schema, Intellectual Time-Space and Narrative Prototype of the Art of Yunnan Rock Paintings* is included. The article analyzes and interprets the themes, modeling, structure and expressive features of Yunnan rock paintings from three aspects: perceptual schema, intellectual time-space and narrative prototype. It is believed that Yunnan rock paintings are a perceptual schema for prehistoric humans to understand and express themselves and external objects, and the narrative prototype serves as a record and inheritance of knowledge. The humanistic connotations carried by these images reflect the time-space consciousness and cognitive levels of prehistoric humans. They use two-dimensional planes to reflect the three-dimensional world and use the real sun and moon to present the unknown spiritual space. The narrative prototypes of Yunnan rock paintings are, first, the life experiences of "painting what one sees on stones and on woods", and second, the beliefs and myths that exist as altars.

In the book *Folk Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan, Volume I* written by Peng Xiao and others(Museum, 1994), on the basis of Wang Ningsheng's classification of themes, contents such as sacrificial ceremonies, nest dwellings, migrations, and

funerals are added to the themes of the Cangyuan Rock Paintings. It points out some ancient composition forms, expressive techniques and spatial structural patterns of Yunnan rock paintings, such as perspective images, diagrammatic or illusory time-space relationships, etc. In terms of themes, it is believed that Yunnan rock paintings are the illusions of the spiritual objects worshipped by the local ethnic groups.

When talking about the part of rock paintings in *The History of Ethnic Minority Fine Arts in Yunnan* by Li Weiqing(Weiqing, 2006), through a comparative analysis of Chinese and Western rock paintings, it is believed that: "The basis of all rock painting creations is the representation in memory. However, representation has a dual character: European prehistoric rock paintings mainly follow the tendency of the concreteness of representation and pursue the resemblance of the 'painting'; Chinese rock paintings conform to the tendency of the abstractness of representation, bringing about the tendency of symbolization of the diagrammatic method." It summarizes the planar and schematic symbolized modeling tendencies of Yunnan prehistoric rock paintings, such as the silhouette style, the frontal law of human figures, and the profile law of animals.

In terms of academic research, through a search on CNKI, works such as *The Art of Ancient Rock Paintings in Yunnan* published by Li Weiqing in February 1985, *A Brief Discussion on the Aesthetics of Chinese Rock Paintings* published by Li Fushun in February 1987, *A Casual Talk on the Modeling Vocabulary of Chinese Rock Paintings* published by Cheng Xuguang in March 1992, *A Brief Discussion on the Modeling Concepts of the Cangyuan Cliff Murals* by Yang Xingji in March 1995, *The Inspiration of the Artistic Spirit of Primitive Rock Paintings* by Xie Hongwen in May 2005(Hongwen, 2005), *The Artistic Characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings and Their Modern Presentation* by Yu Fan in April 2009, *A Comparative Research on the Artistic Styles of Rock Paintings in Southwest China* by Sun Yanling in May 2020 (Yanlin, 2020), *The Research and Application of Cangyuan Rock Paintings of the Wa Ethnic Group in Cultural and Creative Products* by Si Kangkang in June 2021(Kangkang, 2021), as well as the doctoral thesis *The Diverse Development of Prehistoric Art in Yunnan* published

by He Aping in June 2022, etc., have all, to varying degrees and from different perspectives, delved into the aesthetic and design aspects of rock painting art including Cangyuan Rock Paintings. They have analyzed the artistic styles, modeling concepts, compositional spaces, expressive themes of prehistoric rock paintings, as well as the contemporary application issues of rock painting art.

In *A Brief Discussion on the Modeling Concepts of the Cangyuan Cliff Murals* by Yang Xingji, taking primitive religious thoughts, witchcraft, folklore and myths as the clues, the article explores three major themes of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, namely the depiction of labor, hunting and dancing, the consciousness of life, as well as spiritual objects and totems, from the external manifestations of the artistic forms of the rock paintings. It reveals the artistic concepts of the ancient residents, who expressed their consciousness of life and survival, their longing for the continuation of life, their yearning for a better life, and their desire to conquer various natural forces that threaten human beings through the rock paintings. In the article *The Artistic Characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings and Their Modern Presentation* by Yu Fan, the three major themes of Cangyuan Rock Paintings are summarized, including the depiction of the primitive living states and survival situations, the scenes of primitive witchcraft sacrificial ceremonies, and the visual depiction of the origin of ethnic groups. The article also analyzes and expounds on the principles of image creation and the laws of image composition of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. *A Comparative Research on the Artistic Styles of Rock Paintings in Southwest China* analyzes the issues such as the artistic styles and compositions of the rock paintings in Southwest China.

2.3 Part of the European Study Situation

Since its establishment in 1964, the Camono Prehistoric Research Center in Italy has become an important base for prehistoric rock painting research. Under the leadership of founder Emmanuel Anati, the center adopted typological and stylistic methods to initiate systematic research on rock art around the world. Anati's book, *World Rock Art — Primitive Language*(Anati, 2017), was first published in 1993 and is based on his lectures at the University of Lecce in Italy in 1989-1990, incorporating many

theories of archaeology, anthropology and art iconography from the first half of the 20th century. The book is divided into two parts. The first part introduces the foundational knowledge of rock art research, categorizing prehistoric rock art into five types: “primitive hunters, foragers, evolving hunters, pastoralists, and composite economies”. It also proposes a rock art grammatical structure composed of “pictographic, ideographic, and psychological writing”, aiming to establish a systematic model for analyzing rock art. Based on the classification of rock paintings in the world, the grammatical structure of 8 types of rock paintings is explained in detail in the second part. Through the combination of pictures and text, the combination, composition and scene of rock paintings are deeply analyzed.

Emmanuel Anati's other book, *The Origins of Art* (Anati, 2007), takes a multidisciplinary perspective on the origins of art from anthropology, sociology, and art, based on his typology of prehistoric rock paintings and rock paintings as a graphic language. The book is divided into eight parts, with the author arguing that rock paintings of early hunters mark the origin of art and introducing theories of motivation such as hunting magic, shamanic theory and the goddess mother theory. Anati points out that prehistoric art demonstrates human capabilities in synthesis, abstraction, communication, and expression, making it an art form that requires mental effort. Based on the analysis of the ecological environment and types of art origins, he meticulously examines prehistoric and tribal art worldwide, providing a deep interpretation of the fundamental characteristics, structure, content, and meaning of visual arts. Some chapters in the book echo the themes of *World Rock Art — Primitive Language*, such as Chapter Four, which explores the relationship between art and environment, basic typology, paradigms, and archetypes. Chapter Six to provides a detailed introduction and analysis of rock art types. Chapter Five, *The Basic Structure of Art*, elaborates on the author's view of rock art imagery language.

Several main points of reference can be found in two works by Emmanuel Anat. One is the typological division of rock paintings and the other is the linguistic analysis of rock paintings, including theories such as themes, paradigms, archetypes and basic structures of art proposed by linguistic exposition.

The French artist Germain Bazard's *Art History* (Bazin, 1989) is a comprehensive work that traces the history of art from the cave paintings of the Paleolithic era to ancient cultures in Egypt and the Near East, Aztec and Mayan cultures in the Western Hemisphere, early Christianity, the rise of Gothic architecture in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the onset of the Renaissance, and the Baroque period, all the way to the nineteenth century and contemporary art. However, the chapter *The Origin of Art* in this book focuses on the rock paintings of prehistoric humans, emphasizing the creativity displayed in these works. It highlights the evolution and pursuit of "naturalism" in prehistoric art, from the simple line drawings of the Aurignacian culture to the final polychromy of the Magdalenian culture (Bazin, 1989). This aligns with the trajectory of Western figurative realism and provides a valuable case for comparing the forms and styles of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

2.4 Research review

To sum up, standing in the scope of Chinese rock paintings, Yunnan Cangyuan Rock Paintings are as an indispensable part of Chinese rock paintings. Previous studies on rock paintings image and art to provide sufficient theoretical and method reference for the paper research.

Based on the research data of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, the previous conclusions on iconology and art are mainly the following points:

The geographical coordinates of each site of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, the approximate dating of the rock paintings, and the social situation, etc., have been determined. The modeling themes of Cangyuan Rock Paintings have been sorted out: figures, animals, utensils, houses, natural objects, symbols, handprints, etc., which are divided into two categories: religious beliefs and daily life. The modeling themes include herding, hunting, villages, wars, sacrifices, dances, acrobatics, nest dwellings, etc.

Yang Xingji has summarized them into three major themes: labor, hunting and dancing, the consciousness of life, and spiritual objects and totems. The composition methods of Cangyuan Rock Paintings have been explored: Wang Ningsheng believes that the compositions mainly adopt the planar and bird's-eye view methods, with no concept of perspective, and are characterized by two-dimensional space representation, outlining and flat coloring, and free layout. Peng Xiao believes that they have a perspective image, diagrammatic or illusory spatio-temporal relationships, etc. Deng Qiyao believes that they have a perceptual schema and intellectual spatio-temporal features. In terms of the modeling techniques, Li Weiqing believes that they belong to the planar type of silhouette style, the frontal law of figures, the side law of animals, and the schematic symbolized modeling. It is believed that the abstract tendency of conforming to the appearance of the rock paintings brings about the symbolized tendency of the diagrammatic method. Wang Ningsheng believes that the realistic expression technique has been adopted. In terms of the modeling language, Chen Zhaofu believes that the images of the rock paintings are stylized. Regarding the modeling style, Wang Ningsheng believes that it belongs to realism. Ning Keping believes that there are three styles: realistic form, symbolic form, and pattern decoration. Chen Zhaofu believes that there are three styles: realism, decorativeism, and symbolism.

In the modeling techniques of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, Li Weiqing believes that figures are depicted in frontal views while animals are shown in profile, with symbolic elements used to shape the images. The paintings are executed through representation and intellectual composition, where schematic spatial relationships convey an intellectual sense of time and space. The rock paintings lack realistic features but exhibit a freehand style; Wang Ningsheng and others, based on the fact that most of the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings can be identified and interpreted regarding their gender and activities, argue that the modeling has realistic characteristics and belongs to a realist style.

At the same time, through a review of literature, we find that there are still some deficiencies in the artological study of Chinese rock paintings, especially those in Cangyuan, Yunnan province. First of all, in terms of terminology definition, due to the differences in academic background of researchers, there are problems of non-standard and non-uniform terminology used in rock art research, such as the concepts of subject matter and theme, pattern and image are often mixed. Secondly, in the aspect of image analysis, some studies only put forward concepts without in-depth theoretical analysis. For example, in *Artistic Patterns of Chinese Rock Paintings*, Ning Keping, although he showed a large number of pictures according to the patterns, did not elaborate on the framework, structure or pattern of these patterns, nor did he conduct in-depth analysis from the artistic level.

In the analysis of rock art, due to insufficient recognition of prehistoric rock art as works of art and the lack of a relatively unified standard for aesthetic evaluation, there is inconsistency, varying levels, and diverse perspectives in the aesthetic assessment of rock art. For example, Ban Lan and Feng Junsheng, when analyzing the differences in aesthetic characteristics of rock art from both northern and southern China in their book *Chinese Rock Art*, argue that southern rock art primarily reflects agrarian life, depicting the mystery of the world and intuitive wisdom. The forms often employ metaphorical techniques, being subtle and calm. This indicates that the understanding of southern Chinese rock art, especially Yunnan rock art, is not yet comprehensive or profound enough.

In terms of constructing aesthetic dimensions, currently only Zhu Yuan's *Aesthetic Dimensions of Chinese Rock Art* has studied the aesthetic aspects of Chinese rock art, proposing five dimensions: constituent elements, imaging characteristics, thematic connotations, ethnic features, and artistic origins. However, aligning "ethnic features and artistic origins" as aesthetic dimensions with the essence of art still falls short. The issue of the creators' ethnicity in prehistoric rock art is more influenced by sociological research rather than artistic aesthetics, and given that the social

environment was largely the same at the time, it should not be a necessary factor in rock art aesthetics.

In the absence of specific research on the art of Cangyuan Rock Paintings at the art studies level, this paper, from the perspective of plastic arts, constructs an analytical framework for Cangyuan Rock Paintings based on five dimensions: “subject matter, modeling, structure, themes, and artistic style” in accordance with the logical sequence of plastic arts. By comprehensively applying relevant theories of plastic arts, this paper explores the aesthetic categories and characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in these five dimensions and constructs its aesthetic paradigm. The aim is to enhance the social effect of prehistoric rock paintings as an art form for aesthetic appreciation and to deepen the understanding of the public and the Yunnan tourism market regarding the participation of prehistoric rock paintings in social and cultural construction.

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Contents

This thesis takes ten of the most representative rock painting sites of the prehistoric Cangyuan Rock Paintings in Yunnan, namely Sites 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 15 and 16, as the research objects. These rock paintings date back to between 3,800 and 2,700 years ago. The basis for this judgment is as follows: In 1981, the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, used the radiocarbon isotope method (^{14}C) to date the stalactites covering the paintings at Site 3. The data showed that it was $3,030\pm 70$ years ago, and the outer layer was $2,300\pm 70$ years ago. The rock paintings were older than the stalactites. In 1984, Shi Punan and others analyzed 216 diatoms and pollen grains extracted from the paintings at Site 5 of the rock paintings, indicating that they were 2,500 to 3,500 years old. In 2020, Zhu Qian from the School of Geographical Sciences, Nanjing Normal University, used the uranium-series dating method to study Sites 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11 and 14 of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. The results showed that Site 2 dates back to $3,715\pm 7$ years to $3,848\pm 9$ years ago; Site 3 dates back to $2,319\pm 849$ years to $6,213\pm 159$ years ago; Site 7 dates back to $2,871\pm 18$ years to $2,975\pm 32$ years ago, and the possibility of $3,550\pm 79$ years to $3,676\pm 52$ years ago cannot be excluded; the minimum age of Site 14 is $2,692\pm 10$ years ago, etc.

The paper, based on research findings in rock art archaeology, anthropology (including ethnology, shamanism theory, totemism, structuralism), sociology, and combining iconography and art theory, adopts an application-oriented perspective of rock art. It employs principles and methods from phenomenological aesthetics to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the artistic forms of the rock paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan. This approach aims to construct an aesthetic dimension for the rock paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan, thereby advancing the in-depth study of Cangyuan rock art.

The research content of the paper is as follows:

3.1.1 Research on the Treatment of themes in Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Summarize and analyze the categories of themes in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, discuss the treatment methods and effects of themes by authors of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, and the significance between themes and life representation in rock paintings.

3.1.2 Research on the Modeling Characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

This paper deeply analyzes the modeling categories, modeling characteristics, modeling language and other problems of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, and makes qualitative research on the aesthetic form of Cangyuan Rock Paintings from the modeling level.

3.1.3 Research on the Structural Characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

In-depth analysis of the spatial treatment issues of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, and aesthetic qualitative research on the spatial structure forms of Cangyuan Rock Paintings from various aspects such as the structural categories, structural characteristics, and the interactive application and representation of contradictory spaces (intellectual space) and concrete space.

3.1.4 Research on the Artistic Style of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

This paper mainly discusses the unique artistic style of Cangyuan Rock Paintings from two aspects: freehand brushwork of life in decoration and divine spirit in program.

3.1.5 Research on the Artistic Expression of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Life and livelihood are two themes that cannot be bypassed in artistic creation. Cangyuan Rock Paintings start from depicting life and ultimately aim to express the essence of life. This research mainly explores the artistic expressions of Cangyuan Rock Paintings from two aspects: the significance of survival in daily life and the consciousness of divine life within the artistic patterns.

3.2 Research approach

The research of rock art will be based on the analysis of the form and shape of images, which is a fundamental principle that must be followed in the research of rock art. Image analysis begins with the subject matter, which is the most basic material element of form. What to paint is not as important as how to paint it. In terms of artistic creation, the artistic treatment and effect of the subject matter are crucial issues. With unique forms, there also needs to be unique formal handling, such as the overall structure of the image, spatial layout of the picture, and compositional effects. This involves exploring and analyzing the material aspects of the aesthetic interpretation and artistic framework of rock art.

The beauty of prehistoric paintings, lies in the charm of the image, in addition, more important is the superposition of thousands and even thousands of traces of time, this is the art of time and spiritual connotation, they with the emotion of the author of prehistoric paintings, paintings create the original artistic pursuit, the social life form and all factors presented to the contemporary society, become an important dimension of rock art research.

3.2.1 Organize and Screen the Image Data of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

There are 17 sites of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in Yunnan, with over 1,200 identifiable images, more than 70% of which depict human figures. Based on the distribution of images and research content, categorize and organize the image data of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, extract useful information regarding themes, forms, and compositions for quantitative analysis.

3.2.2 Sorting out, screening and analyzing the relevant materials of art research in China including Cangyuan rock paintings.

On the basis of summarizing the research results, this paper reflects on the relevance of its theories to the study of Cangyuan rock paintings in Yunnan province, so as to provide methodological and theoretical references for the artistic research of Cangyuan rock paintings.

3.2.3 Field Research and Insights into Rock Art Iconography.

Integrating insights from field research and studies in rock art iconography, this section employs methods such as modeling and art morphology to conduct an in-depth analysis of the artistic forms and aesthetic essence of the Cangyuan rock paintings. It also proposes an artistic aesthetic framework for these rock paintings.

3.3 Research Methods

3.3.1 Literature Survey Method

This is the material basis for the research of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Without a relatively comprehensive and full understanding and grasp of the images of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, the later analysis of the modeling may be difficult to continue, or it will be superficial.

The literature mainly includes the iconographic data of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Through the collection and analysis of literature, combined with some field research, we can understand and grasp the overall picture and research status of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in Yunnan, so as to provide a material basis for analysis and interpretation and direct visual aesthetic judgment experience.

The literature survey mainly focuses on the research achievements of experts in disciplines such as iconography, petroglyphology, sociology, folklore, fine arts, and design regarding Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Among them, the main basis is the materials of Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968)'s theory and method of iconography, with the research materials in the field of fine arts as the key focus.

3.3.2 Case Study Method

Through field observation of some research subjects of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, combined with the image data of some key locations, case studies were conducted on the subject matter, shape, structure and formal factors of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

The interpretation of the form determines the visual aesthetic study of rock paintings. The artistic interpretation in this aspect requires the application of empirical methods such as art morphology and modeling, and requires the analysis, induction

and summary of the morphology of Cangyuan Rock Paintings based on modeling, so as to put forward the themes and characteristics of modeling treatment that are in line with Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

On the basis of modeling study, further combining the formal analysis method of Swiss aesthete Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945) and the art morphology research methods of Soviet aesthete M.C.Karah(1921-2006), this paper analyzes the shape, space, composition, modeling elements, visual language, and creative rules of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

3.3.3 Way of Qualitative Analysis

On the basis of the case quantitative analysis of the images of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in terms of subject matter, modeling and structure, phenomenological aesthetics, experimental aesthetics and life aesthetics are further introduced to study the aesthetic problems of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in terms of artistic style and artistic expression, and qualitative analysis and research are carried out on the aesthetic expression dimension of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

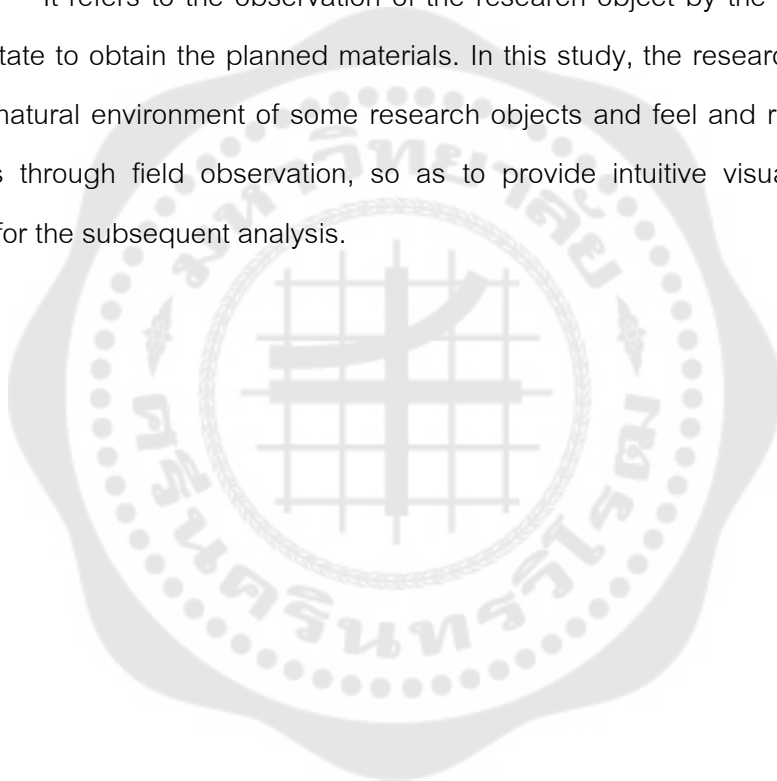
Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and others' phenomenological aesthetics is an aesthetic theory that emphasizes both direct experience and subjective perception. Phenomenological aesthetics considers aesthetic experience as a direct, non-conceptual perception and experience, which focuses on how individuals reveal and understand their own existence and world through works of art. Phenomenological aesthetics emphasizes the essence of the art work and the participation of the audience, which tries to reveal the internal structure of the aesthetic experience through in-depth description and analysis.

Rudolf Arnheim's experimental aesthetics, which studies people's perception of art works through experiments and observation, and puts forward the view that artists express the content through form, while the audience understand the content by interpreting the form. Experimental aesthetics emphasizes reproducibility, verifiability, and quantitative analysis, and it tries to find universally applicable aesthetic laws.

In the interpretation of various dimensions of the aesthetic expressions of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, this thesis respects the direct grasp of aesthetics from “seeing” to “perceiving” within the context of Chinese culture. It also follows and adopts some principles from Rudolf Arnheim’s experimental aesthetics, as well as the phenomenological aesthetics of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and others to conduct qualitative analysis and judgment of the aesthetic subject.

3.3.4 Observational Method

It refers to the observation of the research object by the researcher in the natural state to obtain the planned materials. In this study, the researcher will go deep into the natural environment of some research objects and feel and record some rock paintings through field observation, so as to provide intuitive visual and emotional feelings for the subsequent analysis.



CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH RESULTS

The Lancang River, which originates from Tanggula Mountain in Qinghai Province of China, flows through Tibet and Yunnan provinces. After leaving Chinese territory, it is known as the Mekong River, passing through Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia before emptying into the South China Sea at Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The main course is 4,880 kilometers long, with 2,161 kilometers within China. Yunnan rock art, part of the Southwest Rock Art System, is distributed across the Nu River, Lancang River, Red River, Nanpan River, and Jinsha River basins. Academically, based on the distribution of rivers in Yunnan, Yunnan rock art is divided into five rock art Zones: the Nu River Basin, the Lancang River Basin, the Red River Basin, the Nanpan River Basin, and the Jinsha River Basin. (Qiyao, 2004)

Prehistoric rock paintings exist in Lincang and Dali in Yunnan Province in the Lancang River Basin, and in Ban Phu in Udon Province in Thailand (Lisheng, 2014), while 21 rock paintings with more than 1,400 identifiable images have been found in Lincang in the Zones of Cangyuan, Gengma and Yongde. Among them, Cangyuan Rock Paintings are concentrated in Meng Sheng, Mangkan, Menglai and Dinglai in Cangyuan Wa Autonomous County, distributed in the canyon, Zone of Xiaohei River Basin, a tributary of the Lancang River, which is about 25 kilometers from east to west and 15 kilometers from north to south, with 17 rock paintings sites, more than 1,200 images, and a total, Zone of about 588 square meters. After sampling and analyzing some of the sites by relevant departments and personnel using ¹⁴C dating method, uranium-thorium dating method and spore powder fossil analysis method, the overall age of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is around 3,000 to 5,000 years before and after the present. In addition, from the point of view of rock painting typology, according to Emmanuel Anati's classification criteria, Cangyuan Rock Paintings have the graphic presence of both food gatherers and evolved hunters with bows and arrows, which should be the rock paintings of the Neolithic era from the evolved hunter type to the nomadic (animal husbandry) type.

4.1 Research on the Subject Matter of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Panofsky (Erwin Panofsky) called “people, animals, plants, houses and tools” natural objects as subjects, and the “interrelationships” between subjects were reflected in the “events” such as hunting, animal husbandry and gathering in rock paintings, which were regarded as the “basic meaning” of rock paintings (Erwin, 1955). From the perspective of painting, this article also tends to classify the “events” of “mutual relations” into the category of themes, and call the natural objects such as “people and animals” as themes, which is also recognized by Professor Zhang Yanmei, vice president of West Yunnan University and dean of the School of Art and Design. She believes that, from the perspective of artistic creation, characters and animals are all characters and animals in a certain social environment, and most scholars will refer to them as themes together with the social environment they are in, which is indeed a concept with a certain theme connotation. Dividing this background and clarifying the concept of “subject matter” from a more basic level is more in line with the essence of real art.

Mr. Wang Ningsheng, the earliest researcher of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, basically agrees with Pannovsky’s point of view on rock paintings. Mr. Wang classified the subjects of Cangyuan Rock Paintings into seven categories: figures, artifacts, houses, animals, deities and mythological figures, natural objects, symbols, and handprints, which in turn were applied to the six main categories of hunting, herding, villages, wars, dances, and acrobatics (Ningsheng, 1985). Gai Shanlin directly quoted Wang Ningsheng in his book *Chinese Rock Paintings* and categorized them into two categories: religious and primitive narratives. *The Southern Rock Paintings (II) of Chinese Rock Paintings, Volume 5*, categorizes them into two categories: life and religious beliefs; and Zhu Yuan, with reference to Pannowsky’s view, divides the subjects of figures, animals, and natural objects into three categories: nature, faith, and spirituality.

4.1.1 The Subject Categories of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

With reference to the viewpoints of the above-mentioned scholars and in combination with on-site observations and material analysis, the subject matters of Cangyuan Rock Paintings are classified into three main categories: figures, animals, and symbols.

4.1.1.1 Subject Matter of Figures

Among the more than 1,200 identifiable images in Cangyuan rock paintings, more than 70% are human figures, about 800. Wang Ningsheng divided them into five categories according to the decoration types: feather in the head, animal tooth in the head, animal tail in the head, feather or feathered clothes on the body, and ear ornaments(Ningsheng, 1985). In addition, there is another category of figures with no decoration, mostly bare-handed and a few without arms, numbering more than 500.

Figure 2 shows the various human forms that appear in Cangyuan Rock Paintings.



Figure 2 Types of human figures in Cangyuan rock paintings

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

4.1.1.2 Subject Matter of Animals

Animals are the second most common theme in Cangyuan rock art. Apart from sites 8, 12,13, and 17 where no animal images have been found, animals appear in the other 13 sites, including cattle, monkeys, birds, deer, horses, dogs, pigs, and elephants. Many of these animals are difficult to identify by species. Among animal themes, cattle are the most frequently used, with the highest number of images and the richest variety of forms. Some experts also believe that different breeds of cattle are represented in these images. See Figure 3.



Figure 3 Types of animal themes in Cangyuan rock paintings

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

4.1.1.3 Subject Matter of Symbols

As shown in Figure 4, some symbols appear in Cangyuan rock paintings, which constitute the most mysterious part of the Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

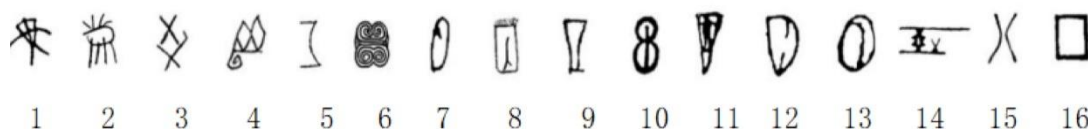


Figure 4 Symbols of Cangyuan rock paintings

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

Symbols 1-9 appear at location 1, symbol 10 at location 3, symbol 11 at location 4, symbols 12, 13 and 14 at location 6, symbol 15 at location 7 and symbol 16 at location 9.


There are about 20 symbols in Cangyuan rock paintings, and their specific meanings are unknown, and there is no special research. Wang Ningsheng believes that the first and second symbols are “random scribbles of a beginner or unfinished drawings of people”, and the 14th symbol is a road sign(Ningsheng, 1985). According to He Aping, the shape including symbols 1 and 2 is “the sun and a humanoid image representing the sun god,” while the two diamond shapes are specifically “a chariot resembling the characteristics of a northern nomad’s tent, with a relatively abstract representation of the axle.”(Aping, 2022) Huang Yilu’s article, *Illustration of the Four Birds Unearthed in Guangnan County, Yunnan Province* argues that “◇” and “△” are in fact yin and yang symbols. With regard to the cloud symbols,

Wang Mingfu, in his study of the Puge rock paintings in Qiu Bei County, Yunnan Province, suggested that the cloud-like shapes of the Puge rock paintings are related to reproduction and multiplication, which can be used for reference. (Mingfu & Hong, 2013) In addition, in the ancient Yi language, there are characters that look like cloud patterns, meaning “to embrace and hold”, the meaning of which can be referred to. (Lisan & Ying, 2004)

Some Chinese folk scholars have developed a set of interpretation methods for the ancient characters, some of which are very similar to the symbols of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, and they have certain enlightening effects on the interpretation of the symbols of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. (See Table 1)

The folk scholars used this interpretation method to interpret the ancient strange text “Cangjie Book”. For example, the meaning of the nine red characters on the left side of Table 1:

Table 1 Control table of ancient Chinese characters and some Cangyuan rock painting characters

The original text of the Cang Jie Book	Character analysis	Character meaning	Cangyuan rock paintings characters	Reference meaning
	ㄥ	Death	◇	Initiation
	ㄣ	tell about	8	Restart
	ㄣ	I am	9	Universe energy
	ㄣ	Mother	□	Jupiter
	ㄣ	Works awarded	8	Glitter
	ㄣ	Noiseless	8	Accelerate fast
	ㄣ	From this	X	Bestow
	ㄣ	Attenuation Killing	⊙	Race
	ㄣ	Tears Overflowing	6	Shake

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

4.1.2 Characteristics of the Subject Matters of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Most of the prehistoric rock paintings are essentially a kind of graphic recording language, and the characteristics of the recording language of Cangyuan rock paintings have been widely recognized and accepted by the academic community. This kind of narrative has a very close relationship with the subject matter: the characters in Cangyuan rock paintings are the characters in the event, the animals are the animals in the event, and the animals and the people are even the cause and effect of each other to make up the event itself. What kind of subject matter is chosen is closely related to the painter's life experience and environment, and the subject matter used in Cangyuan rock paintings comes from all aspects of the author's life, which is firstly a part of life and secondly a part of the composition of the picture.

4.1.2.1 Narrative Characteristics

Deng Qiyao, a rock art scholar, believes that the first site of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is “a heroic epic painting scroll, which depicts the daily reality scene and the magical world of a large tribe with considerable scale, and narrates the wonderful scenes of tribal worship or hunting”. (Qiyao, 2004) In addition, the images of the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, ninth and sixteenth locations all have the purpose of achieving complex narrative through the subject matter of people.

The content depicted in the Cangyuan rock paintings is all a concrete reflection of the interdependence and struggle between man and animal, man and man, and man and nature. The choice of the theme with people as the main subject is determined by the characteristic that man is the subject of events.

Rock paintings are not only a record of the life of Cangyuan ancestors, but also a summary of the life experience of Cangyuan ancestors, as well as the hope for the development of the community, which is a textbook about the life and survival of Cangyuan ancestors. The subjects of Cangyuan Rock Paintings are not only the material material of the event, but also the main body of the event, in which each type of figure clearly shows his identity, status, social function and other characteristics, which indicates that the image has the property of hiding the symbolic identity of a certain type of event, i.e., the image of the figure can partly represent the event itself, and it has the

characteristics of the carrier of the event. Cheng Xuguang thinks that prehistoric rock paintings are the “basic teaching materials” of human primitive education, which include all the knowledge and experience of production life, such as habitat, hunting, animal husbandry and herding, as well as reproduction and worship of gods and spirits.(Xuguang, 1991)

As shown in Figure 5, this is the design of three different forms of figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings Site 6,, Zone 6. Although they belong to the same “unarmed”

people, the differences in their forms show that they each represent a different type of figure: from left to right, the torso is rectangular, with the arm hanging down and the thick body, which is the Hercules of the group; the torso is a long solid triangle, with the arm raised, which is the leader of the group; the hollow triangle figure is the lowest status group of figures. ; the one with a long solid triangular torso, upraised arms, and a stout form is the leader figure; the hollow triangular figure form refers to the lowest status group of figures. In short, each image is a specific symbol of each type of event.

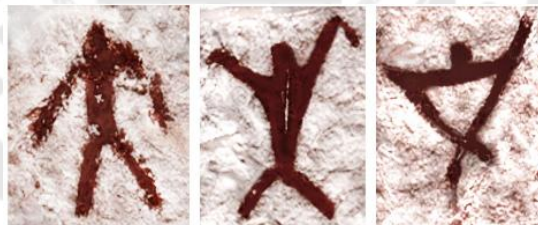


Figure 5 Three different morphological paradigms of human figures in site 6, Area 6, Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Source: Photographed by the author in 2024

Ancient people from the beginning of the acquisition of thinking and wisdom, there will be their own knowledge and experience to record and be passed on to the idea of knotting the rope carved wood and so on became the original way of recording things, which the rope and wood is both the record of the event tool, from the

perspective of the recorded events, then the rope and wood is directly related to the event of the subject matter. In addition, with the continuous expansion and complication of the objects associated with the event, when the simple knotting of ropes could no longer satisfy the need for expression, the specific objects involved in the event, that is, all kinds of subjects in the event took on the function of replacing the event as symbols of expression, and prehistoric rock paintings were supposed to have appeared in such a context. Today, we make conjectures or statements about the events to which they may refer by means of the symbol of the subject matter, precisely on the basis of this narrative feature of the subject matter as a symbol of expression.

Figure 6 is an image from, Zone 1, Site 6, which is dominated by figures, with three other types of subjects, including animals and symbols. Among them, there are five types of figures: the torso of an approximate square triangle without any decoration; the torso of a square triangle appropriately elongated to form a long triangle, trapezoidal; the torso of a trapezoidal, squatting legs, holding a bow and other instruments; the torso of a trapezoidal, squatting legs, painted part of the fingers and toes, with a small number of decorations of the first category; the torso of a square triangle, the head, arms, legs, and other whole body hanging full of decorations of the first category. The five types of figures are the most numerous in the first category. The first category has the largest number of figures, 18, the second category has four, the third category has two, the fourth category has four, and the fifth category has four. The five types of figures embody people with different identities and social division of labor, and they are combined in different numbers to form different arrangements, representing different event segments, which together with the four animal images and two symbolic images participate in and constitute a relatively complete image narrative.

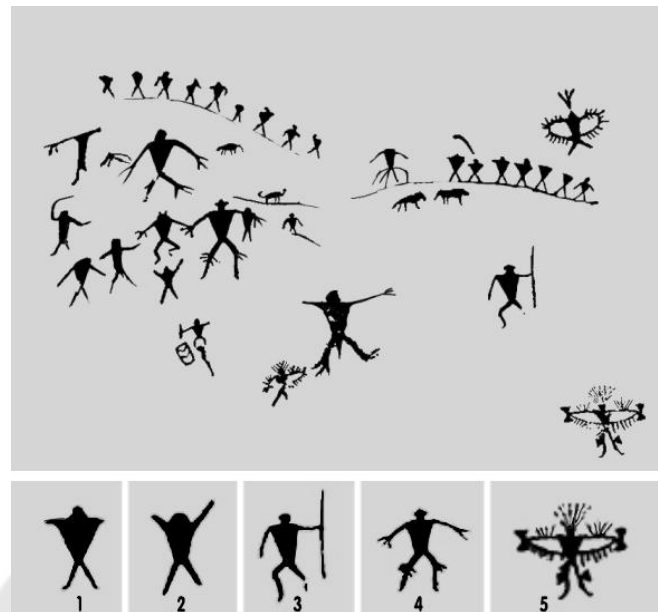


Figure 6 Image of Area 1 and 5 types of human figures at Site 6 of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

As a product of ancient narrative, the author realizes the picture through the depiction of people and objects related to production and life activities, which are the subject matter of modeling and the archetypes of narrative with a certain significance. According to Deng Qiyao, wood and stone recordings, beliefs and myths are the two main archetypes of life in the rock paintings of Cangyuan, and people hope that those documentary narratives or illusory histories will be passed down from generation to generation, so that the history of themselves, their clansmen, their tribes, and even their communities will be immortalized, and therefore, painting the life of what they saw with their eyes and the culture passed down by their mouths to the green mountains has become a special way of ancient people's recounting of ancient stories. (Qiyao, 2004) The narrative function of rock paintings determines that the selected themes have thematic significance in the events, rather than just for the simple purpose of composition.

4.1.2.2 Lifelike Characteristics

The vitality of the subject matter is mainly reflected in hunting, worship, warfare, and dance, as shown in Figure 7, where figures pounding, performing acrobatics, capturing prey, and forming a circle to sing and dance are all direct manifestations of life. These activities are interconnected and interdependent; they serve not only as the backdrop for the main themes of Cangyuan Rock Paintings but also form the painting subjects through which the artists construct their narratives. Ancient people worked from sunrise to sunset, with hunting being the most fundamental way to obtain material resources and the essential guarantee for survival. Consequently, people, events, and objects related to hunting naturally became indispensable elements of this production activity.



Figure 7 The close connection between subject matter and life

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

Location 2, referred to as *Village Map* by Wang Ningsheng and *Evening Return to Village* by Li Weiqing, location 6 *People Emerging from Caves*, and location 7 *Dance Scene*, all vividly depict the real life of the ancestors in Cangyuan. Each category of subject matter in these images represents a direct participant in the lives of the ancestors, embodying their very way of living.

4.2 Research on the Figure Modeling of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

With regard to the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, the two editors-in-chief of the book *Lin Cang Rock Paintings*, as well as the two professors of fine arts at West Yunnan University and Baoshan University, all recognize the geometric language of the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings. They believe that although the rock paintings in Cangyuan are separated by more than a thousand years, the rock paintings in 17 locations all have a very consistent and unified visual effect on the whole. Among them, the triangular symbol is a very typical characteristic of the rock paintings in this area.

his geometric language is neither realistic nor abstract, but tends to be stylized and standardized language, forming the minimalist image modeling type of characters in Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

4.2.1 Figure Modeling Categories of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Do the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings belong to figurative realism or abstract expression, or imagery? The figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings are they represent realistic depictions, abstract expressions, or symbolic representations? Wang Ningsheng believes that the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings fall into the category of realistic modeling. "A figure just a few centimeters tall, from the different postures of its limbs and the degree of body tilt, can show whether it is standing, walking, or running." He adds that even some mythological figures depicted in the rock paintings are modeled after real-life people and animals. (Ningsheng, 1985) Li Weiqing believes that Cangyuan Rock Paintings are abstract pictorial symbols, which start from memory representations and break down the object into several elements, such as the head of the figure summarized in dots, the torso of the figure summarized in triangles or thick lines, and the limbs expressed in straight lines, which are combined to become a "schematic symbolic" modeling.(Weiqing, 2006)

From the perspective of recording things in rock paintings, Wang Ningsheng believes that realism must be a concrete and realistic image, obeying the image to the needs of documentary performance, while ignoring the non-realistic characteristics of the image, because the images in Mr.Wang's eyes are the images of archaeology, sociology and ethnology; Li Weiqing, on the other hand, highlights the

deletion and transformation of “events” by “memory”, emphasizing the “symbolic” nature of the remaining “representations” while ignoring the authenticity of the “events” represented by the representations. He emphasizes the “symbolic” nature of the remaining “representations” and ignores the authenticity of the “events” represented by the representations. He first sees the image, and then he sees the different movements of the hand and the different props held in the symbolic human form, and reads from it the pounding of rice, herding of animals, archery, hunting, picking of fruits, battles, and other contents.

In fact, the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings are characterized by round dots for the heads, triangles or trapezoids for the torsos, and lines for the limbs. The figure shapes are formed by combining points, lines, and planes corresponding to the anatomical structure of the human body, and they do have a representational aspect. However, borrowing Li Weiqing’s term “representation”, this representational feature is merely a kind of “representation” based on figurativeness. It is a shape obtained after the subjective imagery of the artist forcefully intervenes in the objective image and simplifies and transforms it. This kind of non-realistic point, line and surface modeling language has the geometric and abstract painting form characteristics, coupled with the narrative theme of the subject matter of Cangyuan rock paintings, which determines the attribute category of the character image modeling of Cangyuan rock paintings.

4.2.2 Type of Figure Modeling in Cangyuan Rock Paintings

As for the figure modeling of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, Wang Ningsheng first mentioned the modeling feature of “the human body painted into a simple inverted triangle”.(Ningsheng, 1985) Later, Chen Zhaofu and Yang Xingji both agreed to use this view. Chen Zhaofu said that the Cangyuan cliff paintings “reduce the torso of the human body into triangles”.(Zhaofu, 2009) Yang Xingji said, “The most representative figure in the Cangyuan cliff paintings is based on the inverted triangle.”(Xingji, 1995) These views point to the fact that the human figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings have a basic modeling prototype. In addition, there are many character shapes that do not completely conform to the triangular body shape, but are similar to elongated triangles

or trapezoids and other forms. These different forms of characters should be some special types formed by local adjustments on the basis of the prototype.











4.2.2.1 Fundamental Types

The “Triangle” feature of the rock painting figures is specifically manifested in the extremely simplified treatment of the three major body parts of the figure’s head, thorax, and pelvis, forming a circle (●), a square triangle (hollow “▽”, solid “▼”), and a folded line (Λ) as modeling elements, which constitute the two most typical prototypes of Cangyuan Rock Painting figures: “✕ ✕”. Symbolic changes or substitutions of the three variables, especially the torso, limbs and head, as well as the addition of decorations, props and other instruments, can derive different character forms and produce rich variations of character types.

4.2.2.2 Special Types

There are more than 700 identifiable human images in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, which can be divided into 10 types. (see Table 2)

Table 2 Statistics of human figures in Cangyuan rock paintings

Type	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Form											
Quantity											
Location											
1	23	74	46		3	35	6	1			188
2	1	42	12		2		2				59
3	1	13	2	1							17
4	2	9	5		4	1	1				22
5	2	8	5		6	1	1				23
6	3	75	33	13	23	17	7		3		174
7	3	22	10	1	13	1	5				55
8			9								9
9		14	21			1	1				37
10					5						5
11			3								3
12					9						9
13	1				1						2
14		3			3	3	1			1	11
15		2	1	4	5						12
16	27	33	1			12	10	1			84
17		3	1		1						5
Total	63	298	149	19	75	71	34	2	3	1	715

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

Among them, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 type characters account for a larger proportion, especially 1, 2 type amounted to 447, accounting for more than 60%, which coincides with their distribution of the 1st, 2nd, 6th, 7th, 9th, 16th and other locations with the largest number of characters in large scene composition.

Type 1 and Type 2 are a kind of character modeling based on the prototype of character modeling.











Type 1 figure torso to hollow triangle (∇) as the basic features, standing on two legs, most of the armless, only two cases have arms and hold a bow and crossbow equipment modeling. The torso of Type 2 figures is characterized by a solid triangle (\blacktriangledown) as the basic feature, and standing on two legs, various changes are formed through the dynamic treatment of the hands and feet, and the difference between the presence or absence of tools and instruments in the hands makes this type of figure one of the most richly stylized. Type 3 is a class of character forms based on Types 1 and 2 that hold various types of instruments such as bows and crossbows. Type 4 is the figure shape with " ∇ , \blacktriangledown ," as the torso of the figure, with the addition of headdresses, cloaks and other decorations, including the "Feathered Man" and "Sun Man" referred to in various books about Cangyuan Rock Paintings, and other images. and other images. A more specialized class of type 5 with a trapezoidal (\blacktriangledown) or nearly trapezoidal form of the trunk, partly directly rectangular in form, empty-handed or tool-possessing, with stout limbs and crossed lower limbs. This type of modeling "the body is no longer an inverted triangle, but rather a continuous series of strokes of about the same thickness".(Juan, 2016) Type 6 figures have more complex morphological features, with " \blacktriangledown ", " \blacktriangledown " and " \blacktriangledown " all present. The shape in which the torso is elongated vertically into a solid long triangle (\blacktriangledown) is dominant, and some of them are trapezoidal (\blacktriangledown) forms. Where such figures are shaped legs are seated (or squatting), empty-handed, the head or a simple decoration, arms, legs, etc. Feather decoration. Type 7 figures are stylized with a trapezoidal (\blacktriangledown) torso, all squatting, with taller and more complex feathered headdresses, arms mostly raised, a few crossed, and arms decorated with short lines. There are only two examples of Type 8, in Locations 1 and 16, where the

figure's torso is basically characterized by a trapezoidal (▼) shape in a squatting position, with arms in a forked position, no arm ornaments or leg ornaments, and the figure's back is decorated with a cloud motif dorsal ornament. Types 9 and 10 are stylized in a way that is more distinct from the previous figure types; Type 9 is stylized as a rectangular torso with dense lines at the top, and only three instances occur in locality 6. Type 9 occurs in a field scene with a variety of birds and beasts, a large number of people and objects, partly more like a field covered with fruits, and more like a scarecrow inserted in a field than a real figure. Type 10, of which there is only one example at locality 14, is exaggerated, with the face of the figure appearing to be set on top of an "X" shape, and only the torso and limbs are similar to the figure types from the other localities.

4.2.2.3 The Significance of Various Types of Figures

The first eight categories of Cangyuan Rock Paintings listed in Table 2 have richer modeling changes according to the setting of accessories, tools and dynamics, reflecting the connotation of characters in different environments, different identities and classes. They are summarized as follows (see Table 3).

Table 3 Cangyuan rock painting figure type analysis table

Number	Type	Basic feature	Identity meaning
1		Triangle (▽: means naked) Body, standing posture, with hands or no arms, empty-handed without any decoration.	Slave class ▽ low order
2		Triangle (▼: for garment) Body, standing position, arms, empty hand and no decoration.	Civilian class ▼ low order
3		Triangular (▽, ▼, ▼) torsos, holding bows, arrows, and short clubs, some with headdresses, and the categorization of the circular camouflage is based on the internal figures and instrumental forms.	Hunter class ▽▼ low order ▼ scala media
		A class of square triangular (▼) torsos, armed with bullhorns, shields, or short weapons; a class of long triangular (▼) torsos, squatting, armed with long sticks, spears, and so on.	Soldier class ▽▼ low order ▼ scala media
		(▽, ▼) Triangular torso, standing, empty-handed traditional costume with ear ornaments, leg ornaments and feathered headdress.	Sentry(Disguise detection) ▼ low order
4		(▼) Trapezoidal torso, vertical or squatting, stout limbs, empty hands in upraised position, unadorned.	An escort ▼ high order
5		(▼, ▼) All torsos, squatting, standing mixed standing, various entertainment scenes Characters: performers, audience.	Acting class ▼ low order ▼ scala media ▼ high order
		(▼) Trapezoidal torso, squatting, arms in a loop, empty-handed and simple costume, some with simple headdresses or earrings.	Aristocracy ▼ high order
6		(▼) Trapezoidal torso, squatting, empty hands, feathered headdress, mostly arms up, a few crossed.	The leader class ▼ high order
7		(▼) Trapezoidal torso, squatting and empty-handed, with cross-bar headdress, clouded back, and arms in a loop.	Wizard class ▼ high order

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

Type 1: the type of characters throughout Cangyuan Rock Paintings of 17 locations, to farming, herding, hunting, war, rituals and other scenes of labor, the type of characters do not have any instruments in hand, its “hollow” torso form and “unarmed” like naked character design should belong to the prehistoric Cangyuan society engaged in the lowest end of the physical labor, the loss of personal freedom of the slave class portrait. Of course, it does not exclude young children who could not yet participate in social production activities.

Type 2: Compared with Type 1, the difference is only in the torso, and the scenes are basically the same as those of Type 1. Judging from the fact that the characters of this type can hold different tools and evolve into Type 3 so that they can participate in social activities, compared with Type 1, they should be a class of poor people with a certain degree of free status.

Type 3: The figures of Type 2 were given stylized forms with different weapons, and can be divided into three groups of types according to the differences in weapons: first, the figures holding offensive weapons such as crossbows and long and short rods. “Most of the rage-wielders in the cliff paintings are aimed at wild animals, but crossbows are also found in war images (e.g., Location 6, Area 6), so it is known that the crossbow was both a hunting tool and a weapon of war.” (Ningsheng, 1985) The people who appear in the hunting scene are naturally hunters. In addition, for some images of people with “many rays around the circle”, Wang Ningsheng believes that this “clearly represents the sun”. (Ningsheng, 1985) Gai Shanlin believes that there is a shadow of the heroic legend of “Houyi shooting the sun”. (Shanlin, 1996) Deng Qiyao, on the other hand, believes that it is a manifestation of the ancestral people’s custom of “sacrificing to the sun”. (Qiyao, 2004) Based on the characteristics of the figure holding a bow and arrow, it is classified as a hunter. Chinese oracle bones of the Shang Dynasty recorded that the social division of labor in the Shang Dynasty had the groups of “shooting officials” and “shooting teams”, “shooting officials” were mainly involved in military operations, and “shooting teams” were mainly involved in hunting activities to kill various kinds of wild animals, of which the individual members were called “shooting soldiers”.

The Shang Dynasty “shooting soldier” has a dual identity of both soldiers and hunters.(Yuxin, 1999) This type of figure in Cangyuan Rock Paintings also has such attributes.

The second is the shape of figures holding defensive and offensive weapons such as shields, short sticks and bull horns. According to the scenes in which the figures appear, most of them are associated with wars and festivals, and the performance should be about the war and post-war celebrations, etc. Such figures should belong to the type of soldiers, which Li Weiqing called “samurai”. (Weiqing, 2006) This type of figure has two different lower limb dynamics: a standing posture and a crouching posture. Some of the figures have simpler decoration on their heads, which seems to indicate that the figures have a dual identity, i.e., soldier in wartime and hunter in peacetime, and that the two types of people are in fact of the same class of people.

Thirdly, the hands are in the shape of a ring, upward, flat, waist, etc., the arms are covered with short decorative threads, and some of them seem to be clad in feathered costumes, with a variety of earrings and headdresses, some of which resemble the transmitter antennas of modern communication equipment (see Location 1, Area 2), and also resemble the horns of the beasts. Wang Ningsheng called this kind of complicated dress form “bird-shaped man”, other simple dress form “with decoration” of people, Gai Shanlin, Li Weiqing and so on collectively called them “make-up man”. (Shanlin, 1996; Weiqing, 2006) Regardless of the designation, the meaning of concealment through make-up points to this. The fact that this type of figure appears more often in the same scene as the hunter suggests that this type of figure is indeed more often camouflaged and concealed, and that they serve the purpose of confusing and trapping the target on hunting occasions and assisting in the hunt.

Type 4: characters or squatting or standing, stout limbs, upper arms more open and upraised, more and more with the type 2 characters appear in the same scene, seems to be in front of the type 2 characters to protect or block the type 2 crowd activities of the guard image, can be regarded as the guard class.

Type 5: It can be divided into two groups, one is a group holding a ball-shaped object, a short stick, and a double stack. This group of figures with triangular, long triangular, trapezoidal three types of torsos, belonging to the mixed type. Wang Ningsheng believes that these figures with hand movements, “for jumping or dancing”, obviously “reflecting some kind of performance activities”.(Ningsheng, 1985) The double-stacked figure is thought by Wang Ningsheng to be a vaudeville figure, but the scene in which it appears looks more like an audience member carrying a child over his shoulder to watch the performance. Either way, it can generally be judged as a representation of a performance scene. The diversity of the basic forms of the group's figures may indicate that dance, music, juggling, and other skills were not restricted by class in ancient Cangyuan society, and that the performers could be people belonging to different classes, as long as they had the ability to perform on the stage. The second group mainly appeared in the first and sixth locations, with a delta-shaped and trapezoidal trunk, bent legs, squatting posture, arms hanging down and empty hands without holding objects. A few arms had simple short line decorations, and some had simple ear ornaments and head ornaments. In comparison with the Type 3 elaborately decorated figures, the decoration of this type is simpler and has the effect of pure beautification. According to Wang Ningsheng, the scene in which the figures of this type move may be a religious place of some kind.(Ningsheng, 1985) This type of person mainly appears as a watcher or guide, enjoys greater privileges, or is a relative of the leading class, or a low-ranking leader.

Type 6: According to the environment, this type of figure basically belongs to the scene in which the largest form, the most prominent position, in the composition of the main visual center of the shape. Trapezoidal torso, arms raised or crossed, legs bent down in a squatting position, they are either tribal chiefs, or leaders and organizers of a unit group, and are the chiefs with the highest rights.

Type 7: The only two examples of this type, both of which appear in ritual scenes generally recognized by the current academic community, are considered by researchers to be images of sorcerers in ritual activities. Gai Shanlin, for example,

believes that this type of “flat-headed man with a background of scrolling clouds... is endowed with all kinds of unique spirituality and functions.”(Shanlin, 1996)

Overall, the above character forms exhibit a morphological change from hollow triangles (∇) to solid triangles (\blacktriangledown), then to solid trapezoids (\blacktriangledown), and finally to trapezoids (\blacktriangledown). Here, “ ∇ ” represents the lower stage, “ \blacktriangledown ” the middle stage, “ \blacktriangledown ” lies between “ \blacktriangledown ” and “ \blacktriangledown ”, and “ \blacktriangledown ” belongs to the higher stage. The presence or absence of character decorations also aligns with this characteristic.

4.2.3 Characteristics of Figure Modeling in Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Cangyuan Rock Paintings, which are mainly based on imagery modeling, have obtained character types with different identities and functions through the expansion of the basic types of characters, embodying the character modeling characteristics of programmatization and symbolization.

The programmatic and symbolic character modeling of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is the inevitable choice of narrative language rather than expressive language. Narrative language has the prevailing elements of configuration, organizational laws, and standardized structural relationships, and the reader is able to interpret the specific connotations of the text through this feature.

4.2.3.1 Figure Modeling Language in Cangyuan Rock Paintings

The figure images in Cangyuan Rock Paintings belong to the extremely generalized and simplified imagery modeling. This feature is reflected in the modeling language processing of the head, trunk and limbs of the figures, mainly using geometric lines and surfaces to express. The head shape of the rock painting uses circle, semi-circle, square, trapezoid, etc., and different shapes correspond to different identities. Triangles and trapezoids are used in the trunk of the figure. The change from triangle to trapezoid is also the morphological characteristics of people with different identities and positions. The line and surface design and application of the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings fully reflect the design consciousness and modeling ability of the authors of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

4.2.3.2 The Stylization of Figure Modeling Language

The modeling of characters in various classes in Cangyuan Rock Paintings is mainly composed of the morphological design of human body trunk and limbs, which constitutes a language system for character identification from slaves to ordinary people to tribal leaders: One is the semiotic language of the torso “ $\nabla \rightarrow \blacktriangledown \rightarrow \blacktriangledown \rightarrow \blacktriangledown$ ” (low to high order), The other is the lower limb sign language “ $\wedge \rightarrow \cap$ ” (From walking or standing to squatting). Through the combination and arrangement of these language elements, various characters in hunting, war, herding, farming, picking, worship, celebration and other social activities are formed.

This point is also recognized by some scholars, such as Ning Keping's book “*Chinese Rock Art Patterns*”, which argues that “portrait patterns and pictures in Chinese rock paintings have programmed and fixed rules” (Keping, 1990); and Cheng Xuguang, in his book “*A Preliminary Exploration of the Stylistic Vocabulary of Chinese Rock Paintings*”, also analyzes Cangyuan Rock Paintings and argues that the recurring frog-shaped figures in the paintings are in the form of a symbol, which becomes a symbol. (Changzong, 2000) In addition, Deng Qiyao's book *Yunnan Rock Art* gives five types of figure modeling for Yunnan rock art. He categorized the figures with empty hands and without any artifacts as the basic figure of rock painting, and at the same time, divided them into two categories: front and side; the bow and arrow holders are categorized as the hunting figure, and the rest are the weapon holding figure. Deng Qiyao's classification of figures is an analytical exploration of the language of modeling, but he does not analyze the specific characteristics of the figures.

The programmatization of the character modeling language of Cangyuan petroglyphs is mainly manifested in the fact that the characters take “ $\nabla, \blacktriangledown, \blacktriangledown, \blacktriangledown$ ” as the basic language and derive different types of character archetypes, such as people, hunters, soldiers, actors, pretenders, chiefs, sorcerers, etc., which in turn produce different forms of picture combinations. This programmatic characteristic is manifested in the following five basic paradigms.

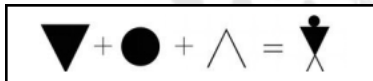
Paradigm 1:



This is a figure modeling paradigm with the typical hollow (∇) triangular torso, round (or square) head, and “ Λ ” shaped lower limbs as the main elements. These three basic elements are keyed by “ ∇ ” and “ Λ ”, which are constant forms, and all standing or walking low-ranking character images are composed of these two symbolic languages as the main body. The data in Table 2 shows that there is a total of 63 character models of Paradigm 1, including 37 models without arms and 26 models with arms, and the character models of Paradigm 1 account for about 9% of the character models of the whole Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

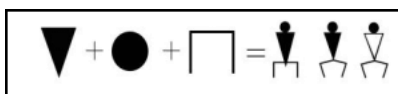
The figures in Paradigm 1 are modeled as front-line workers in activities such as rituals and hunting; they are either laborers at the lowest level of society, in a position of domination, and the armless figures may even be the sacrificial victims in the rituals.

Paradigm 2:



With “ \blacktriangledown , Λ ” as the main element, all the solid trunk, standing or walking characters are mainly composed of these two elements. As mentioned above, the solid triangle “ \blacktriangledown ” trunk and the hollow triangle “ ∇ ” trunk are the detailed differences within the ordinary low-class characters. From the perspective of the presence of the hollow triangle “ ∇ ” characters, the character shape of paradigm 2 has its identity, status or status slightly higher than that of paradigm 1. There are about 441 figures in this paradigm, except for the 10th, 12th, 13th, and 15th locations, 120 figures in the 1st location, 54 figures in the 2nd location, 107 figures in the 6th location, and the rest are scattered in the rest of the locations. The symbolic language of Paradigm 2 constitutes the main part of the figure forms of the people, hunters, soldiers, actors, and empty-handed traditional dressers, which account for about 62% of the figure forms in the whole Cangyuan Rock Paintings, and constitute the basic aspect of the society.

Paradigm 3:



Compared with Paradigm 1 and 2, Paradigm 3 is mainly reflected in the changes of the first and third elements. The triangle of Paradigm 3 is elongated in the longitudinal direction and becomes a solid long triangle “▼”; the third element changes from the lower limbs of the “Λ” shape of Paradigm 1 and 2 to the shape of a frame (⌈) and its variants, which makes the figure change from walking (or standing) shape of Paradigm 1 and 2 to squatting or sitting shape of Paradigm 3, reflecting a posture of a seated figure. The figure changes from the walking (or standing) shape of Paradigm 1 and 2 to the squatting or sitting shape of Paradigm 3, reflecting a kind of seated figure posture. A small number of figures in Paradigm 3 have earrings, headdresses, and other decorative variations on their heads, indicating that the figures in this type of stylized form are, compared to Paradigms 1 and 2, figures of a certain status and freedom within a certain range, and that they are mainly found in sequences of soldiers and camouflaged men holding shields, clubs, and other instruments, belonging to the type of bottom organizers, at least.

Paradigm 4:



Cangyuan rock figure type chart analysis, according to this kind of character modelling in Type 5 “pretender” empty-handed and a simple headdress or earrings began to appear, its main feature is that the torso by paradigm 3 long triangle (▼) into trapezoid (▼), lower limbs for “⌈” shape variant form, squatting posture, no legs, head has a certain amount of earrings or headdress, arm also has a small amount of decorative change. The characters of Paradigm 4 are basically empty-handed, do not hold any equipment, and have a certain status and status. All the middle-level organizers belong to this type.

Paradigm 5:



This paradigm is the basic characteristic of the two types of figures, No.6 and No.7, in Table 3 “Cangyuan Rock Art Figure Type Analysis Table”, which represent the high-ranking leaders of chiefs and sorcerers. Paradigm 5 modeling of the torso, the physical part of the same as Paradigm 4, for the trapezoidal “V” and “N” shaped variants of the form, empty-handed, do not hold any instruments, are seated, and Paradigm 4 is different in the head of the changes and decorations: chief modeling of the head of the semi-circular, the top of the head inserted a taller, larger head, the head of the head of the head, and the head of the head of the head, and the head of the head of the head. The head of the chief form is semicircular, with a taller, single or double-branched bird-feather headdress on top of the head; the head of the sorcerer form is horizontally elongated, and the back of the head is decorated with a cloud motif, which is unique to the sorcerer form only. There is only one example of this type of molding in each of the sites 1 and 16, and the back decoration of the sorcerer in site 1 is in the form of a double cloud pattern, while the back decoration of the sorcerer in site 16 is simpler, in the form of a single cloud pattern, with no arm and leg decorations.

Each of the above paradigms of Cangyuan petroglyph figures is corresponding to a programmed figure type, a feature that is not found in petroglyphs in other parts of the world, which is a more prominent point.

The stylized language of form differs from the descriptive language of purely natural objects. Instead, it is a linguistic system created based on the needs of subjective expression. The stylization of form indicates that rock art creators have transcended their understanding of the specific images they depict, elevating it to a symbolic expression system. The focus is on using these graphic symbols, through certain combinations and arrangements, to create corresponding visual effects, achieving the purpose of recording, transmitting, or promoting certain ideas of a community.

From this point of view, it is reasonable for academics to judge the function of Cangyuan Rock Paintings as narrative paintings at the beginning, and it is precisely because of this characteristic that determines the possibility of its further symbolization as a narrative graphic language.

4.2.3.3 The Symbolization of Figure Modeling Language

Stylization is a regular way of character design obtained by relying on the combination of symbolic modeling elements. The symbolization of character modeling language indicates that the character modeling obtained through programmatic design further presents a trend of symbolization.

Form language is a kind of image language, and the trend of form language to symbolization is the result of people removing complicated parts and making it tend to simplicity. The basic tendency of image symbolization is flatness, simplicity, and universality. In conjunction with the stylized analysis of human figure modeling language, the two character images in Cangyuan Rock Paintings have already acquired symbolic significance. They are composed of extremely simple planar geometric forms and can generate a new level of symbolic system through changes in local elements.

This feature can also be seen in the morphology of the Chinese characters. The similarity between the triangular figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings and the Chinese characters “文” and “射”, highlights the tendency of the symbolic language of the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings. (See Figure 8)

		
The figure modeling of Cangyuan rock paintings		Different writing styles of the Chinese character “文” in oracle bone script: Jinwen, Xiaozhuan
		
Cangyuan rock painting "shooting"	bone script "shooting" “射”	Qin bamboo slips "shooting" “射” (475 BC-221 BC)

Figure 8 Comparison between symbolic character modeling and Chinese character graphics


Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

Oracle bone script is the oldest and most mature writing known in China, dating back to about 3,200 years ago. The rock paintings of Cangyuan are roughly in the same period, but the character images of Cangyuan Rock Paintings appear more primitive and simpler as symbols.

The creation of Chinese characters employs six methods: pictographic, ideographic, associative compound, phonetic-ideographic, rebus, and loan, collectively known as the “Six Categories”. Pictographic characters are derived by depicting the external form of objects to convey their meaning. The character for “wen (文)” represents a standing human figure, with symbols on the chest representing the patterns or designs being depicted. The original meaning of “wen (文)” refers to the patterns on the body, which people carved to ward off disasters and evil spirits, thus “wen (文)” is based on the concept of “human (人)”. Another symbol is “heart (心)” pattern (the pictographic writing of “heart (心)” in oracle bone script), indicating that “wen (文)” represents what people think in their hearts. Ancient Chinese believed that thinking occurs in the heart (心), not the brain. Various symbols used for recording

events and warding off disasters reflect the natural laws of heaven and earth, summarizing human production and life experiences. These symbols, deeply meaningful, are conceived and carved by people after reflecting on them with their hearts.



























The figure modeling in Cangyuan Rock Paintings and the character “wen (文)” in Chinese characters share a common approach to presenting rich imagery through minimalist forms. Both use figures as their subject matter, with the human body as the primary element of their modeling, presenting similar or identical shapes while expressing distinct purposes: one focuses on the symbolic representation of the human body, even anthropomorphic, while the other emphasizes the symbolic significance of the human body itself.

When talking about the rock paintings in Yunnan, Li Weiqing pointed out that “the symbolic tendency of rock paintings is to treat each graphic as a ‘word’ and then combine it according to ‘grammar’ when transmitting information”(Weiqing, 2006) As linguistic symbols, to competently and relatively accurately and vividly record or express themes, one first needs a sufficient amount of vocabulary, followed by relatively mature and diverse grammatical structures. Thus, a sufficient quantity of characters, words, and sentences, along with a certain degree of standardized grammatical structure, become the hallmark of the graphic language symbols in Cangyuan Rock Paintings. The two basic characters “” can derive numerous words with different directional meanings through the addition, subtraction, and variation of their components.

The five basic paradigms of human figure modeling in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, whether viewed from the perspective of graphic symbols or linguistic words, have already achieved standardization, uniformity, and universality. This has played a core role in increasing the vocabulary. Under this standard configuration, various character symbols (i.e., different types of words or language types) are commonly found in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, thus forming the combination patterns of rock art images at different sites.

The specific changes of these two basic characters can be seen in Table 4 for the analysis of character symbols in Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Table 4 Character symbol system of Cangyuan rock paintings

Basic character	Characteristic elements of the character	Derivative character features and functions					
		Noun Verb	Noun Verb	Noun Verb Adjective	Noun Verb Adjective	Noun Verb Adjective	Noun Verb Adjective
	1 (▽)						
	1 (▼)						
	2 (▼)						
	3 (▼)						





Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

Table 4 shows that the character image symbol system of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, which has preliminary basic elements of grammatical structure, is able to complete certain semantic expression through the organization of character symbols, and then combined with some of the animal and abstract symbols, will form a text with a certain depth of expression.

Cangyuan Rock Paintings show the richness of the amount of words of the same type, which is specifically manifested in the multiple forms of stylized symbols of the same type and the same lexical nature.

Emanuel Anati made a comparison of the types of symbols in the language of rock paintings in-depth system analysis. According to Anati, prehistoric rock paintings from all over the world have three types of symbolic language, namely hieroglyphics, ideographs, and psychological text. Hieroglyphs refer to recognizable pictorial images in rock paintings, including anthropomorphic, animal, topographical and tectonic, tools and weapons, etc., and are the subject part of a sentence.

Ideographs are a comprehensive class of graphic and dot and line combination symbols, including anatomical, conceptual, numerical, etc., and are verbs and adjectives. Psychological text is something that is difficult to be defined, some markings that are unrecognizable, and seem to represent neither objects nor symbols, and in syntax usually represent exclamation points. Anati says: "Hieroglyphs, ideographs and Psychological text form the basic grammatical structure of rock paintings, and it would seem as if the associations and combinations in the rock paintings, with their variations in cyclic patterns, have become a factor in the judgment of the human community in the creation of rock paintings concerning the process of association and the conceptual context".as shown in Figure 9, this is Anati's linguistic typology analysis of a (partial) facsimile of a prehistoric rock paintings from Ley-Billita, Spain. Anati considers the concrete, objective natural objects in the rock paintings to be hieroglyphs, such as the "horse" in the picture, and the ten short lines, which also belong to the symbol type, to be ideographs, while another symbol, "a rectangle with rays extending outward", is considered to be a psychogram. (Anati, 2017)

	Hieroglyphics	Ideograph	Psychological text
			
	horse	There are 10 groups of two short lines in a row	The rectangle has rays extending outward

The basic grammar of prehistoric art. Hieroglyphics, Ideograph and Psychological text. The rock paintings are from Lebililla, Spain. The paintings are known as the art of the ancient hunter, the classic grammar. The hieroglyphics is a brown horse, with a logographic character repeated 10 times on it, and above the horse appears a black psychological character: a rectangle that emits lines outward. What message is implied in this work? A basic sensory interpretation is that the 10 women who are given to the horse tribe or totemic components feel joy and satisfaction.

















Figure 9 Emanuel, Anati rock art language type division

Source: (Anati, 2017)

Emmanuel Anati's linguistic typology of rock paintings reveals that the linguistic structure of the selected rock paintings is relatively homogeneous and incomplete, and that this homogeneity is fundamentally due to the scarcity of words involved in the images, which to a certain extent increases the difficulty of interpreting the text.

Compared with Anati's analysis, the textual system of the character modeling language of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is slightly different from that of Anati's. The subject part of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, i.e., its hieroglyphic (or symbolic) portion, has itself been formed into a set of relatively complete symbolic system through programmed processing, which is more capable of fulfilling the function of narration,

rather than relying mainly on ideographs and psychoglyphs for its support. As shown in Figure 10:

	Hieroglyphics						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
							
	Ideographs						
	1	2	3	4	5		
							
	Psychological text						
	1	2	3				
							

The figure shows the characters in pictographic form, which fully show the theme of sacrificial activities and the different identities of people involved in the activities.

Figure 10 A partial graphic copy of site 1, Zone 1, Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

This is also in line with Anati's statement that "when scene becomes the main type of syntax associated with it, mental writing tends to disappear or to exist as an adjunct to hieroglyphics. Among evolved hunters and herders, hieroglyphics were the dominant form of syntax".(Anati, 2017)

In Figure 10, as many as seven types of pictographic characters are used. From Table 3, *Analysis of Human Types in Cangyuan Rock Art*, it can be seen that in each category of symbols, the rock art creators expanded the number of symbols significantly through the design and treatment of human limb forms and decorations. Although not fully counted, they represent the majority of types. Among these, there are at least eight symbols for common people, eleven for hunters, ten for soldiers, six for performers, twenty for disguisers, six for leaders, and two for shamans. The diversity of these symbols of the same type, coupled with the change of their parts of speech, greatly enriches and expands the language expression ability and effect of Cangyuan

Rock Paintings. As long as we grasp the characteristics of these symbols, it is entirely possible to carry out different creative combinations of pictures according to the needs of the theme (event) to be expressed.

Figure 10 shows that, in terms of the use of symbols in single rock paintings, compared with Anati's linguistic system, Cangyuan Rock Paintings not only reflect richness in character language symbols, but also more in the comprehensive use of symbols. Just whether the division of ideographs and psychological text is scientific or not needs further in-depth research.

4.3 Research on the Structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

After obtaining the stylized and symbolic figure modeling language, how to use these nearly standardized figure modeling language to construct the image narrative of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is mainly reflected in the structural design of rock paintings.

As a kind of plastic art painted on natural mountains and forests, the structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings includes the image structure composed of modeling elements; the structure between the image and the surrounding environment (including the site, the natural environment, and the social environment); and the structure between the rock paintings and the time and the years, etc. In a nutshell, the structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is presented as the three types of image structure, spatial structure, and temporal structure, which form three different structural levels, with the image structure being the fundamental one. Among them, the image structure is the fundamental, and the spatial and temporal structures are a form of structure extension based on the image structure.

4.3.1 Types of Image Structure in Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Image structure refers to the organization and connection of the elements of the picture form based on the proportion, light and dark, perspective and other modelling factors, and is the internal logical relationship of the visual form (or compositional form) constituted by each component. Some of the images have more modeling elements, but the form is not necessarily complete, such as location 5. Some images have fewer modeling elements, but the form is relatively complete, such as

location 3. Some images are composed through multiple narratives, such as location 6. Some narratives, on the other hand, are composed through multiple images, as in Site 2. The image structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings involves two types of images, which are manifested in two types of structures: first, the structure of a single independent image (or an image of a subdivision if there is a subdivision), which can be called the first type of structure; and second, the structure of the images that are composed of all subdivisions together, which can be called the second type of structure.

4.3.1.1 Class 1 Structure

Rock paintings that can stand on their own, or images that are divided into multiple district units, in which the district units also have a complete picture form and can stand on their own, belong to this category. Depending on the distribution of images and the arrangement of priorities, the structure is characterized by the following types:

Coordinate structure: The basic units of the picture are parallel to each other, subordinate to the same theme, and are arranged horizontally or vertically to form a composition in a juxtaposed manner. This type of structure has a standardized and unified sense of order, with the picture forms arranged horizontally in rows and vertically in columns. The full map of location 8 and the full map of location 10 belong to this type of structure.

Scattered: In contrast to the parallel style, the combination of basic units has no fixed structure, characterized by a free and loose arrangement that forms the composition of the image. This type of structure creates a sense of rhythm and melody through variations in the density and dispersion of various elements. Except for locations 8 and 10, all other sites have district-level compositions with this structural form.

Separate type: refers to two or more units, which are composed of a complete composition form in the form of parallelism and scatter, each unit can be the same or similar, or can be composed according to different types. For example, the right part of, Zone 4 and, Zone 5 in Location 1, the peripheral roads and people in the

Village Map in Location 2, the whole map in Location 3, Zone 1 in Location 4, Zones 2, 3 and 6 (below) in Location 6, and, Zones 3 and 7 in Location 7 belong to this category.

Ring form: a special form of separate type, in which the various units of modeling are arranged around a circular structure to form a picture form, such as the circular arrangement of the houses in the village in the Village Picture at Location 2, the triangular circular arrangement of, Zone 6 (above) at Location 6, and the scattered circular arrangement of, Zone 1 at Location 9, which is arranged around a pit in a rocky wall.

Hierarchical: refers to the composition form of arranging various modeling units in several levels around a certain theme. The levels can be divided into order and disorder, type (i.e., the classification of elements into corresponding units) and non-type form. For example, location 1, Zone 2, location 2 has a grid decorated figure composition, location 16, east wall, Zone 1. (See Figure 11 left image)

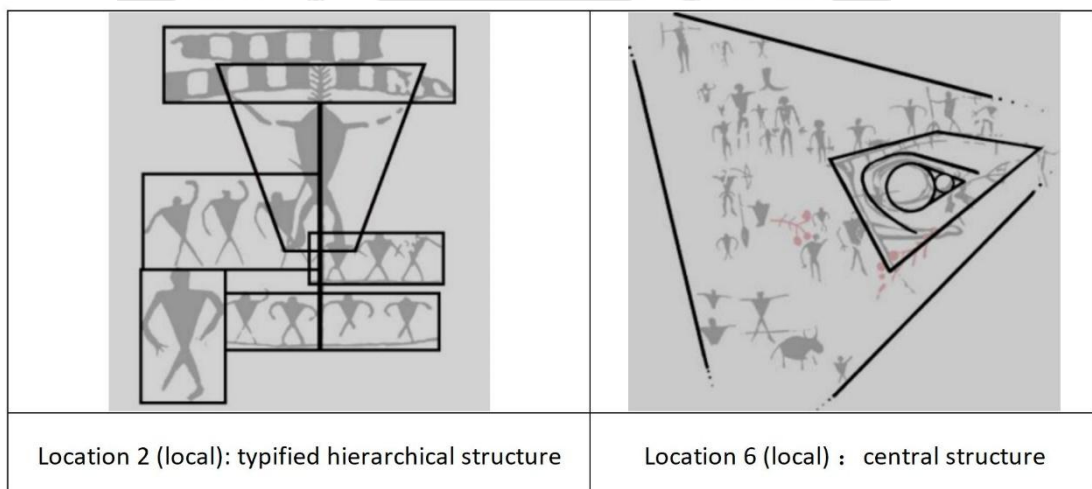


Figure 11 Structural type analysis

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

Centralized: the picture has a thematic event or visual center point, and the structure form in which each unit is arranged around this center point. Location 1, Zones 3 and 6 (above), location 2, the village as the center of the organization of the

Village Figure composition form, location 4, Zone 2, location 6, Zones 1, 5 and 5 (above). (See Figure 11 right image)

Comprehensive: it is a collection of parallel, scatter and other structural forms. When the image, Zone is large and a variety of modeling units are used, a relatively simple structure cannot meet the needs of the image expression. At this point, an integrated structure can solve this problem. The so-called synthesis refers to the selection of two or more structural methods based on needs to organize the composition of various modeling units. For example, in Location 1, Zone 5, the layout is presented in a linear, circular, and central style. In Location 9, Zone 1, the circular layout serves as the foundation, integrating central, parallel, and scattered point structures to form the composition.

4.3.1.2 Class 2 Structure

The adjacent, Zones of the picture in the form of correlation, can be regarded as a unified whole. This kind of correlation one refers to the basic unit of each district constituting the picture, content, etc. has relevance, just because the rock surface local roughness unpainted and the formation of the division of the district; the second is the original painting was a whole, but due to natural weathering, rain erosion, etc. and lead to the division of the district.

Viewed and analyzed from the perspective of interconnectedness, a spatial structural concept can be formed by including the cliff face, the environment, and even the time factor as one of the elements of the picture.

Cangyuan Rock Paintings with the second type of structural characteristics are mainly the images from seven sites, including sites 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 16, which can be subdivided into the following categories.

Segmentation: It can also be called block-based segmentation, that is, the picture is divided into blocks, each block has a relatively independent structure, reflecting a relatively independent picture theme, and each block is combined into an overall picture effect through parallel or scatter structure. Each block is like an article paragraph, allowing different lengths and sizes, but from different perspectives to

assume the theme of a certain level of expression, and together to form the overall shape of the structure. For example, the whole map of locations 1 and 6 (see annexes 1 and 2). Location 1 is a complete wall of the cliff face, with a painted cliff face of nearly 30 meters in length and a picture, Zone of about 36 square meters. There are two types of block divisions in the picture at this location: the natural division of the cliff face, where parts of the cliff face are rough and uneven and unsuitable for painting, and the division of the picture caused by rain erosion and color degradation, which resulted in the disappearance of some of the images in a diffuse manner. The 6th location has a screen, Zone of about 80 square meters, and in addition to the clearer segmented composition, the other more prominent point is the segmentation of the blocks caused by the weathering of the rocks, and the blocks produced by this reason cannot reflect the distinct difference or independence between the blocks.

Scattered: each district does not have a stable and clear picture structure, and the images are laid out in a messy and scattered state. For example, the whole map of Site 5 (see Annex 3). The rock paintings images at this site are blurred and scattered on a 15-meter-long cliff wall, and Deng Qiyao also believes that the rock paintings at this site are "Mostly isolated portraits, and it is difficult to recognize the organic connection between them".(Qiyao, 2004)

Comprehensive type: that is, the compound structure formed by the comprehensive use of several types of structures in the first type. For example, in location 2, the picture is composed of a central, circular, disaggregated and hierarchical structure.

In addition to the above structural types, Cangyuan Rock Paintings also have spatial structural characteristics. Confined to the natural environment cannot do the overall view of the limitations of the formation of the spatial structure between the location of the picture of the various, Zones, it is difficult to obtain intuitive feelings and understanding of the natural environment, including the above structural relationships are with the help of rock paintings workers of the various locations of the image of the

specific results of the mapping to make a judgment, and the blurred lack of the image itself, but also to such a judgment has brought a lot of unexpected effects.

4.3.2 Structural Characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

After adopting the same modeling language, Cangyuan Rock Paintings present two structural types through their organized and arranged design of stylized and symbolic human figures: relatively simple and independent pictorial forms, and more complex pictorial forms composed of multiple, Zones that interconnect. This is a prominent feature compared to prehistoric rock paintings in other regions, particularly in terms of structural style, structural relationships, and structural elements. Cangyuan Rock Paintings achieve distinctive pictorial effects through varied design, reflecting the artists' capabilities in language organization, i.e., structural design, as well as their aesthetic expression skills.

4.3.2.1 Diversity of Structural Styles

Structure is expressed at the formal level, which is the problem of picture composition. The same structure and the same elements can be presented as a thousand different compositions. Analysis of the structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings shows that different styles of structural design, such as juxtaposition, scattering, division, ring, hierarchy, center and synthesis, have greatly enriched the expressive ability of Cangyuan Rock Paintings and improved the artistic aesthetic level of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. The richness of structural styles has become one of the most prominent features of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in expressing different themes with varied structures.

In terms of the picture structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, there are 17 locations, with solo compositions and composite zonal compositions: location 1 has 6, Zones; location 2 has 2, Zones; location 3 is a solo composition; location 4 has 2, Zones; location 5 has 6, Zones; location 6 has 6, Zones (location 4 is further subdivided into 3 groups, 5, Zones into 2 groups, and 6, Zones into 3 groups); location 7 has 8, Zones; location 8 has solo compositions; and location 9 has 2, Zones; 2, Zones at location 10; 4, Zones at location 11; 2, Zones at location 12; a single composition at location 13; 4, Zones at location 14; 3, Zones at location 15; 9, Zones at location 16; and

a single composition at location 17. The total of 60 images is diverse and varied, with no repetitive compositions. The rich structural style provides strong support for the hierarchical and main body-led composition of the rock paintings picture. Of course, it also reflects the importance that the authors of Cangyuan Rock Paintings have attached to the structure of the picture, which reflects the creators' ability to narrate their images, and even more so the maturity of the rock paintings' creators at the level of artistic expression.

4.3.2.2 Spatiality of Structural Relationships

The structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings has spatial and temporal structure in addition to image structure. In the second type of structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, factors such as cliff face, environment and time have been included, and their relationship with the image is that of spatiality and temporality.

Spatiality is the spatial structural relationship between Cangyuan Rock Paintings images and their attachments, such as the cliff face, the cliff face and the mountain environment. Generally, people will only pay attention to the structure between the images in a painting, but ignore the relationship between the picture and the viewer, and the surrounding environment, this behavior of including the surrounding environment and the viewer into the structural elements of the work, only in sculpture and other three-dimensional spatial art or the appreciation of contemporary works of art is more common, and as a prehistoric painting of Cangyuan Rock Paintings with spatial structural relationships, it is mainly because it has a Cangyuan Rock Paintings. As a prehistoric painting, the spatial structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is closely related to the three-dimensional spatial narrative feature mentioned by Deng Qiyao, namely "Green Mountain Altar". According to Deng Qiyao, looking at rock paintings is "different from the 'aesthetics' of facing a picture book or an exhibition hall, nor is it an examination of 'cultural relics', but a kind of cultural shock of thousands of years of culture lurking in our collective consciousness". This kind of shock can only be felt and comprehended in front of the cliffs, among the mountains and forests, and at the time

and space nodes of the ancient and modern times, when these structural elements of the image picture, regional space, and time and age are fused into one. (Qiyao, 2004)

The spatiality of the structural relationship of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is reflected in two aspects: first, the utilization of the characteristics of the cliff face and the spatial construction of the cloth with the shape of the situation (Locations 1, 9, and 16); and second, the spatial utilization of the mountainous and forested wilderness.

Cliff face is not only the carrier attached to the Cangyuan picture, but also the picture of any galloping space, Cangyuan rock painting on the utilization of the cliff wall space features, there are several cases.

One of them is to control the big and small, turning the natural cliff face into a man-made picture. Such as the 3rd, 15th two locations, in the cliff face is larger (the 3rd location of the cliff face of about 80m^2 , the picture is about 0.84m^2 ; the 15th location of the cliff face of about 30m^2 , the picture is about 3.5m^2) in the case of a smaller picture to divide the occupation of the space in the, Zone of the formation of the size of the strong visual contrast, which is the artist through the man-made rock art entity on the natural cliff face of the space of the initiative to control, and thus play the role of This is the active control of the natural cliff face space by the artist through the man-made rock painting entity, thus playing the role of the small to control the big, the eye-dotting to revitalize the whole cliff face, and the image becomes the master of the space, or the cliff face as the background becomes the space for the activities of these living beings. In the 10th, 11th, 12th and 14th locations, although there is a difference between the style of character modeling and the other locations, in terms of the use of spatial elements in a small way, it is the same as using a very small number of images in exchange for the use of a larger space, which has the same visual effect.

The second is to combine the texture and structure of the cliff surface itself, and make use of the characteristics of the cliff surface to make it an effective part of the picture. Figure 12 shows that the first location 2, Zone (above), the upper right figure image placed in the size of the pit above and with the left side of the crowd intentionally open distance arrangement, the figure or hidden in the mountains, or

hidden in the gullies, or standing on the top of the mountain (the so-called luminous body in hand, under the body of the person who is lifted up) such as a lighthouse to guide the crowd under the mountain, no matter what the case, the use of the cliff face of the pits and concave changes and the distance between the treatment, to achieve the theme of the highlighted visual effect. The visual effect is to emphasize the theme. The role of distance in the picture is not only reflected in the rock paintings between the division, but also in the narrative events, division of time and space, and emotional expression, etc.; location 9,, Zone 1 (below) images of the characters are not distributed in the cliff face relatively flat, but around an irregular similar to the bottom of the pot-shaped pits layout, in addition to a small number of flat cliff face, the pits surrounded by more like the jagged rocks, thousands of ravines, the wilderness. Wilderness. If this irregular pot-bottomed pit, together with the surrounding cliff face, is regarded as a structural whole, the visual effect of the image spreading from the bottom of the pit to the surroundings, or of the figures returning to the bottom of the pit and gathering together, will have a basis for the compositional level.

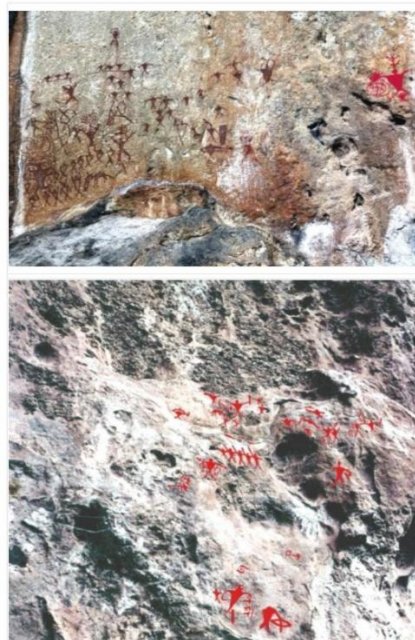


Figure 12 Space utilization in Location 1, zone 2. Location 9, zone 1

Source: Photographed by the author in 2024

Considering the cliff face as a vast space for figures to move around, this conjecture can also be obtained through the control of the size of images such as figures.

Cangyuan Rock Paintings, whether figures, animals and other images, in the rock face space allows for larger images drawn, but the actual size of the rock painting images are relatively small, large in more than ten centimeters, small only a few centimeters. In the tools, technology and other conditions allow, rock painting authors in the larger cliff face uniformly used a very small image modeling, there is only one situation can be explained, that is, people regarded the cliff face as an alternative space, the image is not attached to the cliff face, but running and jumping in the gullies and ravines in the jungle of ten thousand mountains. From the point of view of rock painting figures, animals and other living beings, the cliff face is a real world completely subordinate to the survival activities of these beings. The pits and hollows of the cliff face, gullies and ravines, such as the mountains, such as the plains and fertile fields, these living beings in this natural landscape idyll running, hunting, picking, singing and dancing, rituals, life, which is their life and death together in the world.

In his article, Deng Qiyao also pointed out from the perspective of faith: in the hearts of the local people, the location of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is a completely different spatial structure from that of the mountain fortress. It is the place where people put their dead, the place where they bring their souls to another world, and Deng Qiyao calls this space "The illusionary space-time of the spiritual plateau".(Qiyao, 2004)

To the ordinary viewer, this is a cliff wall, but to the creator of the rock paintings, in addition to being the carrier of the rock paintings, it is the key factor that constitutes the main body of the rock paintings and shows the main theme of the rock paintings. Only in this way, we can understand why in the huge cliff wall, only painted some of the largest not more than 10 to 20 centimeters or so miniature images? It is only then that we can understand why some of the images were placed in a place full of hollows and extremely cramped when there was obviously a relatively flat cliff face. This

is a reflection of the rock art authors' understanding of the spatial element and their ability to make the most of it. In short, the introduction of spatial elements has become a feature of the structure of "spiritual space" constructed by the authors of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Of course, standing in the artistic point of view, or standing in the contemporary viewer's point of view, this "spiritual space" will not be confined to the rock painting images, will not be confined to the cliff space, it will naturally be extended to the Lan Cangjiang River along the vast mountains and forests in the wilderness, ravines and steep ridges, and even the age of the three-dimensional space of an all-encompassing structure. When visitors walk into Cangyuan and into the thousand-meter-long mountain corridor of the rock painting valley in Bang Ge Village, it seems that every platform, every stone wall, every depression and every small point on the thousands of meters of mountains from north to south are covered with images of rock paintings, which are all the existence of rock paintings. In fact, somewhere in the east of this mountain, the first location of Cangyuan Rock Paintings that nearly two hundred images are running in the depths of the jungle, and a total of 17 locations of rock paintings are also hidden in this Cangyuan land like the cliff face tumbling and undulating.

Whether standing on the top of the mountain overlooking the whole field, or wandering through the canyon and river looking up at the blue sky and white clouds, at this time the viewers of the paintings, the bustling crowd in the rock paintings, as well as the thousands of living beings on this piece of land that have ever passed by, will be integrated into the present moment due to the space-time structure, which is perhaps another spiritual spatial structure of the Cangyuan Rock Paintings. From this point of view, we may truly understand that Cangyuan Rock Paintings construct a three-dimensional world with a flat modeling form.

4.3.2.3 Temporality of Structural Elements

In Cangyuan Rock Paintings, structural elements refer to the basic units of rock paintings, which mainly include the three elements of points, lines and surfaces with a certain pointing object. Its temporality refers to the fact that the visual forms constructed by these points, lines and surfaces with specific pointing significance will change over the years, such as the partial destruction of points, lines and surfaces brought about by rain erosion and cliff wall spalling in thousands of years, which is the temporal feature of structural elements at the structural level.

Taking the rock paintings at location 2 as an example, the structural changes caused by temporal factors are mainly manifested in two places: first, the right side of the picture is eroded and covered by water stains and calcification on the picture due to the erosion of the picture formed by the water flow and scouring of the water over the years, which leads to separation and blurring on the right side of the picture and creates the effect of at least two, Zones of the picture; secondly, the composition of the figure grouping with square frames at the bottom of the picture, the left side of the picture has a cliff face flaking leading to the picture being mutilated and incomplete, and some of the The left side of the image has a fragmented image caused by the peeling off of the cliff face, some of the figure images are lost, and there is a large, Zone of color diffusion on the right side, both of which have an effect on the hierarchical structure of the image. The determination of the hierarchical structure of the picture is based on the reality of the picture after eliminating the two influences, which is only a reluctant move to facilitate the structural analysis, and this temporal feature has a certain impact on the inner structure of the picture.

The rest of the picture structure of various places, are more or less this time factor of transformation, prompting us to do aesthetic analysis of the rock art form, do not forget the ancient and modern structural changes brought about by the picture of the form of the vicissitudes of time is also one of the connotation of aesthetics.

4.4 Research on the Theme Expression in Cangyuan Rock Paintings

In the analysis of themes, the practice of conflating habitual subjects with themes has been separated. Essentially, any subject used in artistic creation is integrated into life and becomes a concrete vehicle for narrative. For Cangyuan Rock Paintings, these are daily activities such as worship and hunting, which not only constitute life itself but also form the most superficial theme of the rock paintings. The rock painters' depictions of daily activities like worship and hunting are not intended to narrate these events themselves, but rather to convey certain themes of "emotion, spirit, and life" through the narration of these events.

4.4.1 Theme Positioning of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

At present, there is no clear conclusion on the theme of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in academia, and only a few opinions are scattered in some scholars' related works. For example, Gai Shanlin argues in his book *Chinese Rock Paintings* that "Cangyuan Rock Paintings were created for religious or secular purposes". Although he talks about the reasons for the creation of rock paintings, he thinks that rock paintings express religious or secular purposes, which are not only people's expectations of life and religious enthusiasm, but also the true expression of both primitive religion and realistic life. Among them, the primitive religion expresses nature worship, totem worship, ancestor worship and so on, while the realism of life is expressed in hunting, gathering, living, rituals and costumes. These views fully express the theme of Gai Shanlin's Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Deng Qiyao's definition of "sensory schema, intellectual time and space, narrative prototype" of Yunnan rock paintings expresses his understanding of the theme of Yunnan rock paintings. Under the perspective of "transformation", he undoubtedly shrouded the rock paintings that "reproduced certain aspects of the material and spiritual life of ancient Yunnan's ancestors"(Qiyao, 2004) in a mysterious and illusory veil: As a concrete symbol in the cultural tradition and symbolic system, the folk art of various ethnic groups in Yunnan "are relatively independent yet interwoven with each other in the vast expanse of time and space... The spiritual connotations and cultural consciousness they encompass are precisely the main value of Yunnan's ethnic folk art.

Thus, the illusion of imagery inevitably leads to the illusion of image, and the illusion of image is precisely the external reflection of the illusion of imagery deeply rooted in the hearts of various ethnic groups".(Museum, 1994)

Yu Fan was the first scholar to study the artistic characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. She put forward three major artistic themes, such as "the original living state and survival situation, the scene of primitive witchcraft and sacrificial ritual, and the image of ethnic origin", which was a relatively full exploration of the artistic themes of rock paintings.(Fan, 2009)

The above views show that there are two levels of the theme of Cangyuan Rock Paintings: one is the demand of real life, and the other is the demand of thought and spirit.

4.4.1.1 The Main Theme of Survival Written by People and Things

They can be summarized into four categories:

The first type is religious sacrificial activities, appearing in Location 1, Zone 2 and Location 16 East Wall, Zone 1. This type of composition primarily focuses on depicting sacrificial scenes, illustrating the various social classes involved in the rituals. It connects with the content of preceding and succeeding images to portray the specific procedures, organizational methods, and personnel involved in the sacrificial activities. The emphasis is on conveying the functions of the sacrifices, the methods of the rituals, and their significance for other activities.

The second type is hunting production activities. This type of activity includes hunting, grazing, picking, pounding food, etc., which are spread throughout the rock paintings in Cangyuan. The "Chopping and Grinding Pictures" in Location 1, Zone 1, Location 4, Zone 1; the "Monkey Catching Pictures", "bird Catching Pictures", and "Cattle Hunting Pictures" in Location 1, Zones 3, 4, 5, and Location 6, Zone 5; the "Cattle Herding Pictures" on both east and west walls of Location 1, Zones 5 and 6, Location 6, Zones 2, 3, 4, and 6, and the "Hunting Pictures" in Location 16, which mainly focus on herding. The "Village Pictures" in Location 6, Zone 1 and Location 7, Zone 3 also include laborers. All these activities revolve around production, depicting groups of

people striving for survival through hard work. The images aim to convey experiences and skills related to production activities, as well as reflections on production and life.

The third type is resource competition activities. Resource competition is primarily carried out through military means. The war scenes depicted in Cangyuan Rock Paintings include: Location 1, Zone 5 (contesting prey), Location 2, Zone 1 (defending home), Location 6, Zone 6 (contesting hunting, Zones and prey), and Location 9, Zone 1 (protecting hunting grounds). The objects of contention are mainly material resources and living space. War brings sacrifice, but the purpose and significance of war, as well as its organization, lessons learned, and other aspects, are among the themes concerning survival conveyed by these images.

The fourth type is the celebration of bountiful harvests and entertainment activities. Locations 1 in, Zone 5, Location 3, Location 6 in, Zone 6 (Upper), and Location 7 in, Zone 1 and 3 all feature entertainment activities. Most of these activities are depicted alongside other content in a single work, forming a complete record of life, as shown in Figure 13, which Chen Zhaofu refers to as the “shield Dance” scene (the red dot in the image is an inherent element of rock art, but its purpose remains unknown). Some activities are relatively independent, such as the “Dance Figure” in Location 1 of Location 7. These activities primarily depict celebrations of successful hunts and victories in battles, reflecting the lifestyle of the ancestors of Cangyuan from an artistic perspective.

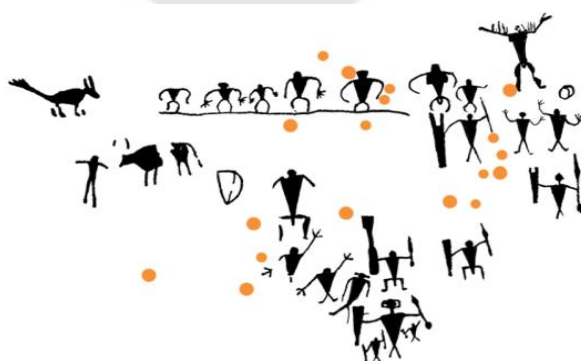


Figure 13 Shield Dance at Location 6 in Area 6 (Upper)

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

The early inhabitants of Cangyuan first focused on practical issues of life. The transmission of life experiences ensures the continuity of life and the survival of the community. The rock paintings depict herding, hunting, warfare, worship, dancing, acrobatics, village life, and nest dwelling, which narrate the daily routines of the ancestors. They truly convey the invaluable knowledge gained through the sacrifices of their lives, a legacy that needs to be passed down from generation to generation. These images even carry a mysterious energy in their rituals.

4.4.1.2 The Divine Life World Constructed by Human and Nature

This is the expression of spirit and life, the pursuit of spiritual world beyond material. Rock paintings are presented in two aspects:

The first aspect is reflected in the main theme of human and material survival. Besides material production activities, people also have demands for fulfilling their physical and mental needs, such as dancing, acrobatics, and celebrations. These needs are primarily expressed through the fourth category, "Harvest Entertainment Activities", which showcase the unity of human spirit with nature. Taking the "Dance Figure" from Location 7, Zone 1 as an example, the dynamic design of the figures presents a state of ecstasy and confusion, with the dancers completely immersed in their own inner world. This can be understood as a reflection on real life, a form of relief and comfort at the spiritual level, and an expression of the world of life.

The second aspect is that factors such as timeliness have caused changes in the structure of rock paintings, which in turn have led to the interaction between the audience and the rock paintings, and between the rock paintings and the natural mountains and rivers and many other elements, which together have given rise to the people's worship of the mountains and rivers and the expression of their inner aspirations. In other words, under the influence of environment, time and other factors, the world of divine life in Cangyuan Rock Paintings is a spiritual world that man and nature gradually build together. Its formation stems from the recognition of nature's divinity by people upholding the belief that everything has a spirit, as well as the joint role of the divine preaching of sorcerers and other aspects.

Cangyuan Rock Paintings form the divine artistic mood of Cangyuan Rock Paintings with the help of picture language, environmental language, and the myths and legends involved in the process of circulation. Legend has it that the red color of Cangyuan Rock Paintings flickers according to the climate change, which brings a lot of speculations to the viewers, and the programmed and imaginative treatment of the image brings a sense of uncertainty in addition to the visual aspect of the mind as if it were a dream.

The four examples of legends included in Wang Ningsheng's book *The Discovery and research of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in Yunnan Province*, which more clearly recounts the origins, functions, and many miracles of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, not only show the direct relationship between Cangyuan Rock Paintings and the production of the ancestors, but also illustrate the value of the divinity of rock paintings in the minds of the ancestors of Cangyuan.

4.4.2 Carriers of Theme Expression in Cangyuan Rock Paintings

The theme of Cangyuan Rock Paintings contains two aspects: life and living. The theme of life is presented in the form of gathering, farming, herding, domestication, hunting, fighting, war, villages, nesting and so on; the theme of life is presented in the form of rituals, songs and dances, acrobatics, ceremonies and so on. They can also be regarded as two basic carrier types, material and spiritual.

The first category of carriers almost encompasses all the rock paintings in Cangyuan (including those depicting animal husbandry raids initiated by war), such as gathering, farming, herding, domestication, and hunting, which all fall under the category of labor production aimed at meeting survival needs, forming the main theme of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. The purpose of armed conflicts and wars is essentially also for survival, or to live, which aligns with the meaning of labor. Nest dwelling and village life, on the surface, are ways of living, but for example, in the *Village Map* at Location 2, one cannot assume that the "village" is the main subject; rather, the organization of ceremonial activities similar to pre-war mobilization is the core concern regarding the safety of the village.

The second category of rituals, songs and dances, acrobatics, ceremonies, etc., belongs to the form of carrying the theme at the spiritual level. Among them, ritual activities only appear in the two panoramic images of Locations 1 and 16, which are both witchcraft in nature and of religious ceremonial significance. On the one hand, they are generally recognized by academics as a way of praying to the gods through sorcery and casting magic spells on objects to be conquered in order to ensure that specific production activities are carried out and to obtain the hoped-for results. On the other hand, it is more important to record and preserve the empirical knowledge of how to organize and dispatch various types of social activities. Songs and dances, which are both songs and dances, are scattered in the rock paintings (1st location, Zone 1 and, Zone 5) and also independently assembled (1st location, Zone 2, 6th location, Zone 6, and 7th location, Zone 1) and so on. In terms of form, part of them are group songs and dances for religious and ritual occasions, and part of them are free-association songs and dances for celebratory occasions. "Almost all ancient and folk arts are associated with some kind of sorcery, ritual, worship, or religious belief" (Museum, 1994), and song and dance, acrobatics, and ceremonial rituals are essential elements of them, which can be regarded as the category of spiritual activity-type vehicles.

4.4.3 Means of Theme Expression in Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Compared with easel paintings in the general sense, Cangyuan Rock Paintings belong to comprehensive spatial painting art, embodied in the organic combination of the painting image in flat space and the combination structure in three-dimensional space. The image of flat painting builds the foundation of visual form, while the integration of three-dimensional space pursues the transformation and sublimation from natural space to spiritual space. Therefore, its means of theme expression is also embodied in two systems.

4.4.3.1 Picture Language System

Red, the main color of Cangyuan petroglyphs, is also the only one. According to chemical analysis, it is the same as prehistoric petroglyphs in other parts of the world, which are made by using animal blood mixed with hematite pigment and animal fat. The color is either dark or light, as dark as dark purple, light as brick red,

plus the change of air humidity, light and present a confusing, bright and uncertain color effect.

Texture, including the natural texture of the cliff wall on the formation of the image of the effect, but also includes the cliff wall after the weathering of the peeling effect to the image of the effect. Because of the roughness of the cliff wall, pits and hollows, the images painted on it naturally take on the visual characteristics of mottled roughness, coupled with the wind and rain erosion, the cliff wall weathering and shedding and other factors, the original complete image, picture, some of which become fragmented and indecipherable and the formation of new texture characteristics, these factors are needed as part of the means of expression of the theme of the rock paintings.

Modeling refers to the main body of images in Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Its imagery, programmed, symbolic attributes and functions have been elucidated in the previous section. As a means of subject expression, new visual forms generated by changes brought about by natural weathering and cliff face peeling should also be added here.

Composition is the visual result of internal structure, and it is the picture form presented by the organic organization of modeling elements according to structural relations. It has been pointed out in the structural analysis that the structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings mainly presents two types, and its composition shows rich and colorful formal changes according to these two types of structures.

4.4.3.2 Environmental Language System

The environmental language mainly refers to the natural form of the cliff wall, including mountains, forests, clouds and mists, as well as the mythological legends involved in the transmission of rock paintings, which constitute the image living space. These form the divine part of the aesthetic of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Taking the spatial environment of Site 1 of Cangyuan Rock Paintings as an example, it is located on the southeastern hills of Banduo Village in the middle section of the road from Yong'an to Menglai, after the entrance to the Menglai section of

the Mengliang Grand Canyon. It involves newly developed attractions such as the current Ban'ge Folk Village, the Thousand-Meter National Painting Corridor, and the Tiankeng. (See Figure 14) Geographically, the Thousand-Meter National Painting Corridor runs along the eastern mountains of the north-south oriented Grand Canyon. The rock art site is situated on the eastern hills south of Yongpai Point Village, with the Tiankeng attraction to the northeast of Banduo Village, following the mountain path northward. From the map, it can be seen that visitors must first reach Banduo Village to experience the customs, architecture, and cuisine of the Wa ethnic group's folk village, directly facing the thousand-meter-long cliff landscape known as the "Thousand-Meter National Painting Corridor," imagining countless rock art images hidden or leaping within. The creators likely based their aesthetic psychology on this, using the development of natural landscapes to compose the prelude leading to the rock art site. The Tiankeng attraction, in turn, forms a repetition through the resonance of the rock art site, expanding the spatial scope of the rock art scenic area to some extent, serving as an auxiliary and supporting element for the spatial framework of the rock art site.



Figure 14 Spatial schematic diagram of the location of Site 1 in Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Source: The author based this on the map drawn by Baidu in 2024

Generally speaking, the first location of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is the cultural soul of this space, and without the existence of the first location of rock paintings, this, Zone would have no soul. Therefore, all the environmental languages, such as canyon, landscape, sinkhole, ethnicity, etc., are stating and creating an atmosphere for the language of the picture, in order to strengthen the core of the rock paintings and emphasize their status as the dominant region in this space.

The canyon, landscape and sinkhole are relatively static environmental language, while the forest and clouds are relatively dynamic parts of the environmental language that may change at any time. The, Zone where the rock paintings are located is densely forested, and apart from the road, all you can see is the layers and layers of dense forests that are endlessly entangled. Walking in the middle of it, sometimes rain falls, sometimes smoggy, hot and humid. In the flag-waving sound of this relatively dynamic environmental language, and then think of the thousands of years of kneeling crowds in the dense forest, the red pixies flying into the forest from the cliffs - the dreamlike spatial effect has been perfectly presented.

From the reality, the language of this spatial structure is not complete, pure, mainly reflected in the "Thousand meters of national painting corridor" is not completely around the main body of Cangyuan Rock Paintings and clear their own identity, status, the name itself that there is the idea of another stove. In fact, Cangyuan Rock Paintings of this cultural core is here unique existence, and similar natural landscape should be countless other places. Therefore, comprehensively focusing on the rock paintings as the main language is the necessity of the purification of the aesthetic language of space, and also the purification of the theme of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Language, is for the theme of expression services, Cangyuan Rock Paintings through the picture language selection, design, not only in the language elements of other painting forms have the common basic types, but also has other forms of paintings do not have after the programmed, systematic standardized design of the language system, but also from the language of rock paintings of the symbolic features,

so that we see Cangyuan Rock Paintings of the theme of the expression of the imagination is not the hunting, sacrifice, etc. These life appearances, but in the “similar and not similar” modeling language, the Chinese art history has been inherited continuously, the spiritual connotation of life. It is also from this symbolic feature of rock painting language that we can see that the theme of imagery expression in Cangyuan Rock Paintings is not hunting, rituals, etc., but the spiritual connotation that has been inherited and lived on throughout the history of Chinese art outside of the modeling language of “likeness and unlikeness”. Therefore, in today’s aesthetic process, we will incorporate the environmental language into the language system of theme expression, which is in line with the reality and social significance of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, the first location for tourism development.

4.5 Research on the Artistic Style of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

The style of Cangyuan Rock Paintings has been discussed by many predecessors.

Wang Ningsheng believes that Cangyuan Rock Paintings are “realistic, even if they depict mythological figures, they are modeled on real life people and animals”. Cangyuan Rock Paintings have a realistic style of “natural, vivid and simple”. (Ningsheng, 1985)

Taking Cangyuan Rock Paintings and the Helan Mountain rock paintings as examples, Ning Keping compared and analyzed the rock paintings in the north and south and concluded that the rock paintings in the south had a romantic style. (Keping, 1990)

Chen Zhaofu analyzed the monkey images in Cangyuan Rock Paintings and believed that the rock painters were “especially good at describing monkeys”. In general, Cangyuan Rock Paintings were classified as “realistic style”. (Zhaofu, 2009)

The book *The Folk Arts of Yunnan Ethnics* provides a general description of the texture and expression level of form language, stating that “Yunnan rock paintings possess an aesthetic style similar to world rock art, characterized by simplicity and naivety. At the same time, they exhibit a distinct simplicity and freshness different from

cliff carvings in Northern China, as well as the unique beauty and mystique of Yunnan rock paintings in terms of form and artistic conception.”(Museum, 1994)

Gai Shanlin combining Wang Ningsheng’s research on Cangyuan Rock Paintings, he places Yunnan rock paintings within the context of Chinese rock painting analysis, pointing out that Chinese rock paintings have two stylistic characteristics: representational realism and non-representational abstraction. He believes that the majority of Chinese rock paintings (including those from Cangyuan) belong to the representational realism style, with only a portion of symbolic images falling into the abstract style. (Shanlin, 1997)

Deng Qiyao believes that the creators of Yunnan rock art “integrate perceptual images with imagination, blending the representations in memory with the facts in reality.” What they depict and reproduce is a perceptual image of ancient ancestors, an image that comes from both intuitive sensations and experiential knowledge. They paint with sensory representations and compose with intellectual structures, presenting an intellectual sense of time and space. According to Deng Qiyao, this is a non-representational rock art style influenced and transformed by rationality. (Qiyao, 2004)

The above viewpoints present two attitudes: one is to acknowledge the realism of the content while ignoring the imagery in the form, generally considering Cangyuan Rock Paintings as a realistic style; the other is to recognize the realism of the content and view the form as an integration of “perceptual images and imagination”, or what might be called “decoration” or “symbolism”, generally considering Cangyuan Rock Paintings as a romantic symbolic style.

So, what is the artistic style of Cangyuan Rock Paintings?

4.5.1 Stylized Expressions of Warmth and Vitality of Human Life

This is determined by the objectivity of the narrative content in Cangyuan Rock Paintings. As an imagery-based form, the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings are not realistic representations but are formed through a combination of several standardized geometric elements, creating characters with different social strata and identities. However, from a thematic perspective, they also possess two major

characteristics: narrativity and lifelikeness. The rock paintings depict events that occur at present, providing a realistic portrayal of current living conditions and survival scenarios. Using stylized modeling language to reflect human life is one of the styles of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

4.5.1.1 The Expression in a Stylized Form

The stylization and symbolization of the character modeling language of Cangyuan Rock Paintings also create the stylized form expression of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Symbolic forms such as triangles and trapezoids constitute the basic human figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings. These basic human figures representing different social strata, in accordance with the expressive needs of certain themes, form the organizational patterns of the different scenes in the 17 locations of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. From this, we can clearly feel that beneath the standardization of the human figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings lies the freedom and diversity of the expressed content. By virtue of this characteristic, we can not only attempt to interpret the content expressed in the rock paintings of the 17 locations, but also fully try to design the composition of the scenes according to the theme settings. This is the stylized style reflected in the formal composition of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. (See Figure 15)

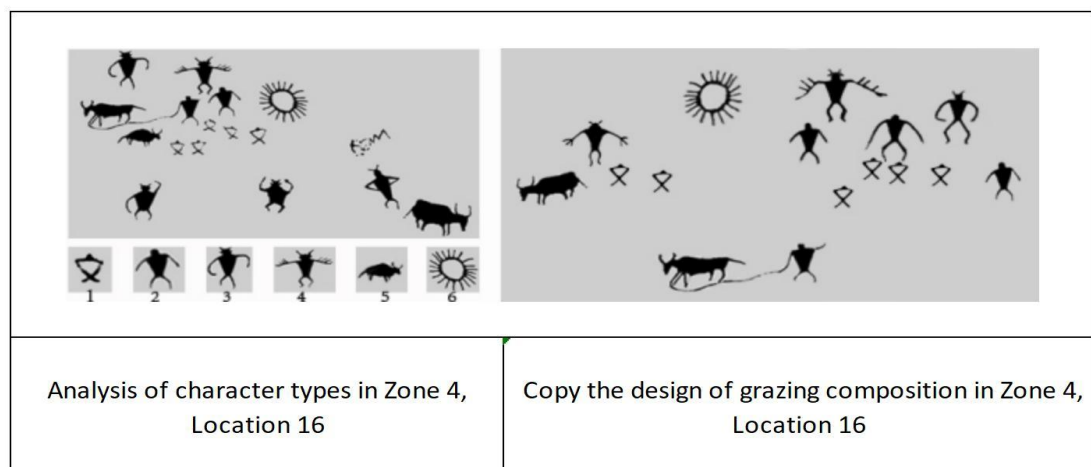


Figure 15 Imitation design using a stylized language

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

By imitating the image of location 16, area 4, four types of figures, one animal and a sun symbol were adjusted appropriately to ensure that the basic types and themes of the figures remained unchanged. That is, new picture forms could be obtained in composition. This feature is mainly based on the organizational logic of the language system of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

From the point of view of the function of creating rock paintings at the beginning, the modeling design and composition of petroglyphs are not to satisfy the needs of visual aesthetics, but entirely to serve the demands of theme expression. Under this premise, the language is just a carrier, and how to let the visual graphics back, so that the narrative theme forward, so that the viewer will know the meaning of the image at a glance, reflecting Cangyuan Rock Paintings author of the high level of artistic design, which is left to today's audience of the aesthetics of the plastic arts.

4.5.1.2 The Flavor of Human Life

The stylized and symbolized language of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is designed around the theme of human beings and unfolds around the theme of life. They cover all aspects of the lives of the ancient ancestors, such as sacrifices, hunting, domestication, herding, farming, ceremonies, battles, singing and dancing, gathering, acrobatics, daily life, etc., and are a documentary reflection of the lives of the ancient ancestors in Cangyuan.

Take the panoramic rock paintings at locations 1 and 6 and the single rock paintings at location 2 as examples.

Figure 16 is a copy of site 1(See Appendix Figure 22 for the real scene). The first location is located on a cliff about 3.5 kilometers northeast of Menglai Township, which is the only panoramic rock painting site open to the public at present. The rock painting is about 30 meters long and covers an area of 45 square meters. There are 188 figures, divided into 6 areas. In the first area, there are 8 people and 4 animals, arranged in upper, middle and lower grades. Among them, there are 2 ordinary people and 6 hunters and soldiers. They show the daily work such as herding, hunting,

pounding grain and processing food. From the characteristics of the hollow triangle in this area, it seems to be the image of a naked child watching the fun.

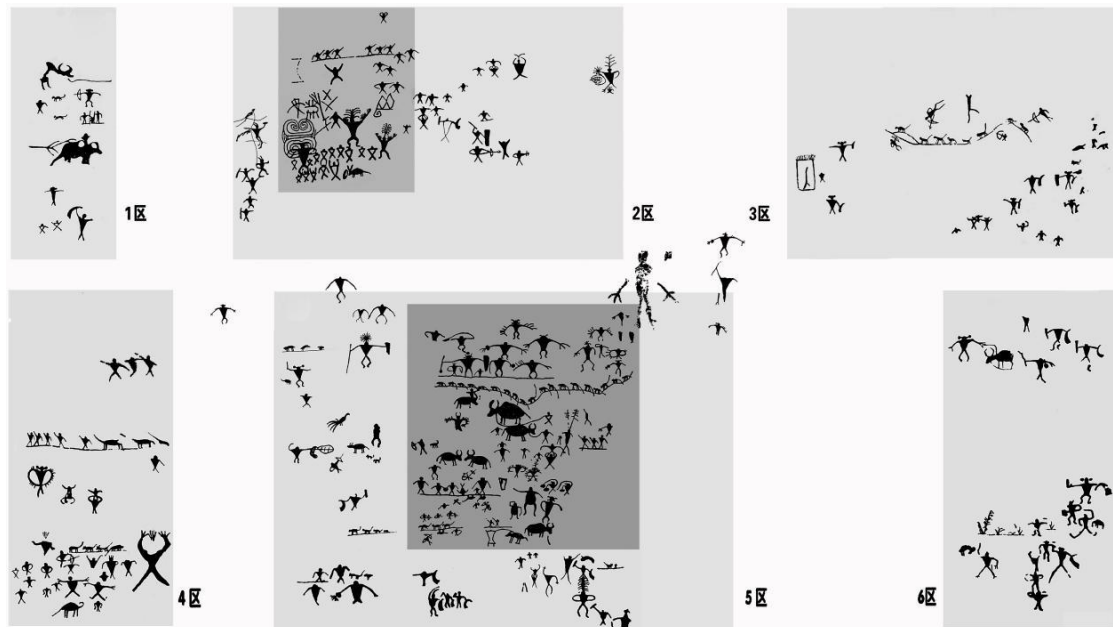


Figure 16 Schematic diagram of site 1 of Cangyuan rock paintings

Source: This figure is compiled by the author based on the literature content of Wang Ningsheng and Ma Juan, combined with the images taken from real scenes. (Ningsheng, 1985) (Juan, 2016)

The second area is the sacrificial scene, The first group of six figures on the left consists of two performers with two horns on their heads, facing the right in a running and jumping position, and four soldiers. Group 2 is shown on the dark background, with 14 solid triangular (▼) figures in the upper part as Unit 1. The lower part, centered on three decorative giants such as a sorcerer and a chief, and 14 hollow triangular (▽) figures, a long-eared and long-tailed beast, and 7 symbols whose meaning is not yet known, form the second unit. On the right is the third group in the “

< ” composition, slanting to the upper right are ordinary people, two of them carrying people on their shoulders are more like adults and children watching the event than actors; slanting to the lower right are the soldiers' squads. The 4th group on the far right is a 2-person combination of a figure in traditional costume holding a luminous object in his right hand and a cage underneath it, with a small person under his arm who seems to be lifting it up. The area depicts or narrates how to organize and hold a sacrificial activity, which includes common people, hunters, soldiers, performers, sorcerers, chiefs, etc., of which the hollow triangular (∇) armless figure is more likely to be a captive for sacrificial purposes. The picture not only shows characters with different identities, but also the division of labor between the various types of characters, together with the seven ideograms, which are intended to highlight the organization of the ritual activities through the organization of the characters, the work arrangements, staffing, the purpose of the significance of the theme of the expression is more obvious.

In addition to Zone 2, Zone 5 is also the area with the most prominent living atmosphere. The image of Zone 5 can be divided into six units: the dark part in the picture forms one unit, surrounded by two units on the left and three units below. The entire composition centers around the dark part, with about 23 simply dressed figures forming an array at the top (including figures with light backgrounds), followed by a horizontal line of 19 walking monkeys below. The lower part features a composite composition related to herding, hunting, warfare (defense), and entertainment.

Except for the absence of the seventh type of figures, all other types are present in Zone 5, indicating that, apart from the lack of sacrificial activities, this area features a vivid combination of comprehensive scenes including hunting, herding, acrobatics, etc. Figures from all social strata are adorned with accessories, holding ox horns and bows and arrows. They are either engaging in bullfighting or performing acrobatics. The figures in simple attire are located at the highest part of the picture, seemingly overlooking various activities below. If this is the case, their role as important guests for observation becomes clear, and the entertainment and performative nature of each unit below are thus affirmed.

Based on the structural situation of the entire painting, there are a relatively large number of images in Zone 2 and Zone 5, and the composition of each individual painting is relatively complete and full. Generally, researchers start from the perspective of religious beliefs and consider the sacrificial scene in Zone 2 as the core of the entire painting. However, in terms of the number of figures, composition area, and size, Zone 2 does not hold the position of the visual central area. Instead, the entire painting shows a kind of assembly-line recording method that pays no attention to the primary and secondary aspects. To a certain extent, this also proves the characteristic that the rock painting is mainly used for narration. Figure 17 is a copy of site 6. (See Appendix Figure 27 for the real scene)

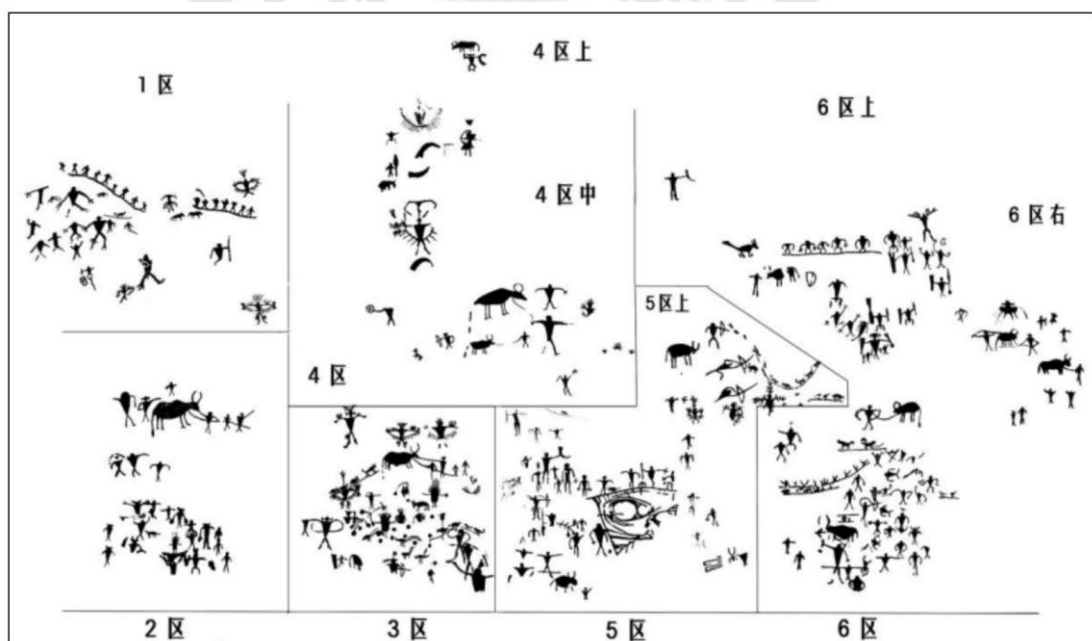


Figure 17 Diagram of each area of Site 6, Cangyuan Rock Paintings (copy)

Source: The figure is drawn by the author with reference to literature.
(Ningsheng, 1985) (Qiyao, 2004) (Art, 2006)

The rock paintings at site 6 cover an area of about 80 square meters and contain 174 images of people. The site is also divided into six zones.

The most prominent areas in the painting are zones 3, 5, and 6. Zone 3 features commoners, soldiers, hunters, disguised figures, performers, various animals, and branches laden with fruit. By integrating the arrangement of people, animals, and fruits in this area, the painting generally reflects the production and labor scenes of the ancestors of Cangyuan. As summarized by Professor Ma Juan, these scenes belong to “cattle hunting, fruit gathering, and bird hunting.” This is evidenced by the numerous depictions of disguised figures, who are likely accompanying the hunters.

The scene in Zone 5 is divided into two parts. The upper right part is a picture of an ambush of a monkey troop, composed of hunters, people in elaborate costumes, and a group of monkeys. The lower left part of the picture unfolds around two circles, one large and one small. Outside the circles, there is a triangle resembling a boat shape that frames them. The figures are arranged along the upper edge and the left side of the triangular frame. The figures are mainly common people, hunters, and soldiers, with common people being the majority. Five hunters or soldiers can be seen, and there are also configurations of animals, fruits, or branches. Zone 5 is unanimously referred to by scholars as the “People Emerging from the Cave Picture”, the “Picture of People Entering and Exiting the Cave”, or the “Cave Dwelling” picture, but it seems not very appropriate. There are no performers indicating celebration in Zone 5. Except for hunters and soldiers, the vast majority of people have their hands hanging down and are standing in a relaxed state. Considering that in the structural analysis part, it was pointed out that at Site 9, there is a composition with the natural concave pits on the cliff surface (resembling caves) as an element. Therefore, it is unlikely that a circle was artificially drawn here to express a mythological theme. Instead, in this mountainous and forested area with numerous sinkholes, safety prevention education on how to prevent falling into sinkholes during hunting and grazing processes seems to be more necessary.

Zone 6 is usually referred to as the “War Map” by researchers. The main basis is that there are three characters lying horizontally in the picture, so they are regarded as victims in the war. However, according to the configuration of the characters in the picture, combined with the content of the image in the upper right of Zone 5, and there is a person in elaborate clothing leading a cow forward, it is more like a hunting scene where the ambush of bison was successful. This zone is divided into three parts, and the upper and lower parts have a relatively clear narrative. The characters in the lower part of the image are mainly ordinary people, including one hunter, one person in elaborate clothing, one person in simple clothing, and one soldier holding an ox horn. In addition, there are two large cows, about eight cows that seem to be hidden on the hillside with only their cow heads exposed, and several other unknown animals. The upper part of the picture should be a joyful scene celebrating the hunting harvest, mainly composed of soldiers, people in simple clothing, and a leader. There are also two animals and two symbols. The people in simple clothing are in a squatting position and lined up in a row, while the soldiers hold their weapons high and are arranged on the right side and below. The picture is filled with orange dots, which look like fruits or campfires, and may serve to set off the atmosphere.

A rather prominent feature of Location 6 is that there are images of elaborately attired figures, either “feathered figures” or “bird-shaped figures,” in all areas of the whole picture. In total, eighteen such figures can be identified. Among them, the “bird-shaped figures” in Zone 1, Zone 3, and the upper right part of Zone 5 are relatively complete, while most of the others are incomplete. The existence of these elaborately attired figures fully demonstrates that the theme of the picture at Location 6 is almost entirely centered around productive activities such as hunting and gathering. It may introduce the experience of productive activities like hunting, or depict the implementation and results of hunting, or express the mood of harvest, and so on. In short, it always revolves around the theme of real life.

The single-frame composition is more prominent in the second location.
See Figure 18.



Figure 18 Real scene of Cangyuan Rock Paintings at location 2 (image highlighting has been made)

Source: Photographed by the author in 2024

The full length of the picture at this location is approximately 5 meters, and its height exceeds 2 meters. It is a single-panel composition with a village as the main body, and the characters are arranged around the village. Most of the figures in the entire painting are ordinary people and hunters, with a small number of soldiers, leaders, and animals as well.

The village is represented by an oval shape outlined by lines; on the left, there are two roads connecting the village; on the right, there should have been five roads in the original drawing, three of which are mutilated near the village, and the other

two are merged into a single one after leaving the village for some distance. On the first road on the left are hunters (or soldiers) with bows and crossbows and sticks, and on the second road are ordinary people driving their animals toward the village, with five other people standing side by side between the two roads. On the right-hand side, except for the second road, there are people driving livestock, and on the other roads, there are ordinary pedestrians, so the people above the village should be related to the pedestrians on the previous roads. There are 16 dry-fence houses in the village, of which 7 on the left have line-hooked roofs, and 9 on the left are flat-painted red, and some of the people working in the village.

Judging from the situation of the image, this is just an ordinary schematic diagram similar to that of a village. However, in the lower part of the village, a group consisting of at least 11 ordinary people surrounding a giant should play a role in highlighting the theme of the entire picture in terms of its conception.

Wang Ningsheng also believed that: "From the village map, we can see that people lived a settled life. However, the creative intention of this map does not seem to be simply to reflect the situation of the village, but rather to convey a deeper meaning." Based on his analysis of the scene where people carrying weapons were driving livestock such as cattle and pigs towards the village, Wang Ningsheng believed that this depicted the scene of a victorious return after a plunder. (Ningsheng, 1985)

Deng Qiyao also recognized the significance of this "mysterious figure or deity" hanging high on the frame beneath the grid of reality and illusion. He pointed out that it represents a hunting and plundering scene, and this set of images "creates an aesthetic atmosphere where realism and illusion interpenetrate for the mundane village life and the unpredictable hunting and plundering scenes of life and death." (Qiyao, 2004)

Of course, there is another situation that deserves attention as well, and that is the gathering of the team represented by the chief, who is making some kind of a mobilization speech to his people under two colorful flags fluttering in the shape of squares, on a high hill outside the village, in relation to the village. The content of the

speech might be a pre-war mobilization against the dangers the village was facing; it might be a deployment of personnel within the village to set up the village guards and how to ensure that the normal functioning of the people's lives in the village would not be disturbed, etc., but in any case, it should be a matter of great importance for the village's safety and development. In this way, the relationship and significance of the village and the "mysterious figure or deity" can be clearly explained.

In addition, from the perspective of the venue where the speech was held, the painter not only captured the entire mobilization scene but also observed the distant village, roads, pedestrians behind the mobilization venue, as well as the houses and buildings within the village and the people engaged in labor. This kind of thinking and approach to spatial composition is also a unique example found throughout the Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

It should be said that the rock paintings at 17 locations in Cangyuan do not possess the mysterious, solemn, or even terrifying atmosphere that some researchers believe. These rock paintings are neither myths nor witchcraft. Instead, they are entirely documentary painting artworks created by the painters based on real-life scenarios, through extracting materials from their actual lives. They are narrative texts of practical experiences derived from life, permeated with the flavor of everyday human existence.

4.5.2 Embodiment of Divine Spirit in Decoration

The pattern and symbolization of single elements; the programmed and ordered form of modeling make Cangyuan Rock Paintings more inclined to rational decoration and less to the sensibility of painting, which eliminates the more natural attributes of modeling elements, so that the subjective will of the creators and viewers has gained the opportunity and space to be accommodated, and a kind of spiritual appeal that transcends the material world and has eternal qualities has become one of the connotations of decorative style of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Decoration is a kind of norm and order. Cangyuan Rock Paintings construct a new order according to the subjective logic of individuals by rational selection and

induction of the complicated natural people, things and objects, which reflects the need for the spiritual expression of human beings as the subject of things.

4.5.2.1 The Radiance of Decorative Modeling

In order to achieve the functions of communication and interaction, Cangyuan Rock Paintings adopt a planar, stylized and symbolized language design in terms of modeling. They have accomplished the mission of transforming from a painting language to a decorative language, and reflect the artistic brilliance under the meticulous design of the modeling language.

From the most basic path of decoration — patterned objects, the first step in the figurative representation of figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings is to flatten the natural form of the figures. On this basis, techniques such as exaggeration, addition, subtraction, and organization are employed to transform the objects into standardized elements that meet the requirements of decorative composition. Using these templates, series of image combinations are formed through repetitive and sequential arrangements, thereby achieving an orderly decorative effect.

It is embodied in the following two elements of language decoration design. Individual element: refers to the decorative treatment of a single character element. Cangyuan Rock Paintings use a planar method, symmetrical composition, standardized visual effects of figure decoration modeling. As shown in Figure 19, the decorative treatment of characters such as wizards and leaders in location 1, location 2 and location 9 is illustrated. The triangular design of the Yangtze River Delta of the wizard in location 1 is added with a background decoration of double cloud patterns, which fully presents the identity characteristics of the wizard. The figure at location 9 is a type II ordinary person, decorated with trembling curves that may reflect the physical and mental state of the person at that time. The leader figures at locations 1 and 2, based on symmetrical designs, are enhanced with arm ornaments and head decorations, which serve both as embellishments and symbols of status.

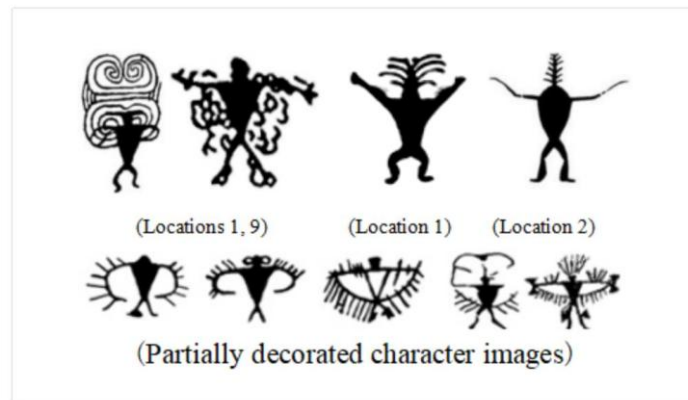


Figure 19 Decorative treatment of individual elements

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

Unit element: refers to a decorative unit formed by combining decorated single elements, creating compositions such as repetitions. This kind of decorative modeling technique, in which units are formed by the repeated arrangement, gradual arrangement, etc. of identical or similar elements, is quite commonly used in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, creating a very prominent sense of rhythm and aesthetic beauty. This technique is particularly common in the modeling designs of contemporary murals and the like. As shown in Figure 20, the decorative types in rock paintings at Locations 1, 6, and 9, as well as Zone 3 of Location 5, Zone 1 of Location 6, and Zone 1 of Location 7, all have such units. In addition, the units in the *Village Map* at Location 2 generally follow this repetitive pattern.

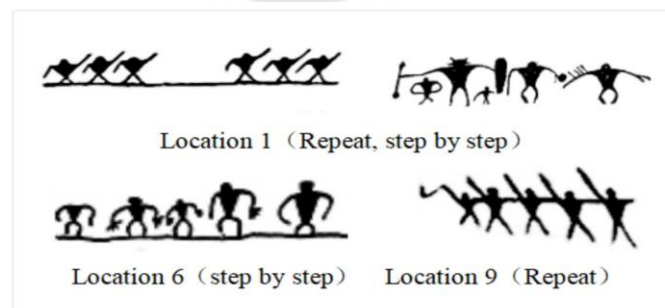


Figure 20 Unit decoration type

Source: Drawn by the author in 2024

4.5.2.2 The Construction of the Spiritual World

In addition to weakening the graphics to highlight their narrative function, another fundamental expression of the purpose of language norms is that in the secular cognition of ancient people, symbols have the power beyond nature and contain the mysterious power endowed by gods. This power constructs a spiritual space through the mountain environment, folk customs, myths and legends, and religious beliefs that ordinary people can only kneel and look up to.

The mountainous and forested environment reflects the mysterious nature of the rock painting sites. Mountains have mountain gods, trees have tree gods, water has water gods, and everything has a spirit, which is a belief that has been deeply imprinted in the hearts of the people for thousands of years, and which continues to this day.

Figure 21 shows the Jia Ma paper that has been handed down to the local people in Baoshan and is still in use today: the God of Grass, the God of Hunting, the God of the Mountain, the God of the Land, and the God of the Tree, which is the talisman paper burned when worshipping heaven and earth and the natural creatures, and plays the role of communicating with the creatures, protecting the land and water of a side, and blessing a side of the people, which embodies the concept of the spirit of all creatures.



Figure 21 Baoshan folk worship supplies: Ji Ma paper

Source: Photographed by the author in 2024

Canyuan locals believe that it is not advisable to stay at the rock painting site when the sky is dark, because that place is not where people are, it is a passageway for the gods to come and go. In the evening, the red pixies on the cliffs will come out. Deng Qiyao once mentioned that “They appear and disappear, drifting and uncertain, as if suggesting the existence of a spiritual space to people. Thus, the top of some rock paintings became a place for people to deposit the dead, perhaps hoping that passing deities would take the souls to another world”. (Qiyao, 2004) In the evening, it is required to avoid the places where deities appear. It is a psychological reason to avoid colliding with deities and attracting disasters, so as to achieve the purpose of declaring the place where rock paintings are located as forbidden.

The author of the rock paintings consciously placed the rock paintings in the high mountains and dense forests and steep cliffs, that is, consciously hoping that the mountain spirits would guard the rock paintings. The mysterious nature of the environment in which the rock paintings are located, as well as the resulting danger and

horror, is a conscious effort to strengthen the sacredness and mysteriousness of the image symbols.

Folk customs add to the rock paintings a sense of awe that makes people stay away. People have long held the view that words and symbols possess a certain magic power or sacred portent, which can be glimpsed from the creation of ancient Chinese characters. In the previous article, when mentioning the symbolization of the language of character modeling, the origin of the Chinese character “文” has been briefly introduced. In fact, some scholars believe that the Chinese oracle bone inscriptions are in fact the religious spells used by the ruling class of the Shang Dynasty in occasions of rituals and cultivation. Ancient people believe that this spell runes contain the mysterious energy of heaven and earth, with the indication of good and bad luck, drive away disasters and evil spirits, communicate with heaven and earth, and help people to cultivate themselves to become immortal and other functions. Therefore, “文” is not ordinary decorative patterns, nor is it purely as a recording tool for today’s text, but rather refers to some kind of symbols that indicate the meaning of heaven and earth. China’s earliest oracle bone inscriptions are not called oracle bone characters that is to include “symbols” this layer of meaning.

This religious worship of symbols is no exception for Cangyuan Rock Paintings. When Wang Ningsheng was investigating the first location rock paintings, he personally met an old woman from the Wa nationality who lost four dollars and went to the first location to ask an immortal for guidance on how to find it.

Legend has it that the rock paintings will emit strange light and color, which is caused by the manifestation of the treasures behind the rock paintings, and whoever can open the door of the stone wall will be able to walk into the treasure trove behind the cliff wall to obtain the gold, silver and jewels inside. Wang Ningsheng said, Ding Lai village the Wa nationality had excavated in the 2nd location, and then discontinued due to no gain. So far, a hole at the root of the cliff at the second location is the remains of the excavation at that time.

The desire to seek wealth will lead people to discover the rock paintings, and the existence of the Immortals and let those who did not succeed in their dreams of wealth do not dare to act rashly. Nearby people say that there are immortals living behind the cliffs, and the rock painting images are painted by the immortals, so no one can move it, and whoever moves the rock paintings will be punished by the immortals, and the evil they do will involve the whole family, and even death.

Of course, immortals can bestow blessings on people and get rid of illnesses and disasters, and if one can make devotions to the rock paintings, one can get help from the owner of the rock paintings, the immortal, to avoid disasters and get rid of illnesses and other effects. Therefore, every year and festival, people from the neighboring villages would go to worship and ask for the help of the immortals. (Ningsheng, 1985)“some rock paintings have natural stone platforms underneath them, stained with wax, which can be seen to have been used for a long time as an altar for lighting incense and candles. On the cliff wall next to the rock paintings, there are some grooves or small holes, which have been stuffed with some prayer scripture folds, grains, wax strips, cigarettes, tea, flowers, bananas and coins, and so on. In some rock painting sites, the stones under the rock paintings have been knelt on by devout worshippers to make them smooth and shiny. This custom of offering rock paintings used to be very popular in the past and has continued until modern times”.(Qiyao, 2004)

The myths, sorceries, anecdotes and other spiritual contents given by later generations were precisely produced under such an environment and mentality. These contents also happen to be the desired effect of the symbolic language and the choice of hidden locations, which further strengthen the mysteriousness of the symbols, which in turn affect the rock paintings and construct new cultural connotations of the rock paintings. This repeated superposition eventually forms a space that is both superstitious and frightening to future generations. This existence has an ineffable magic, whether it is in this environment or just remembered in the mind, people will be attracted and controlled by it involuntarily.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

5.1.1 Research Conclusions on the Subject Matter of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Subject matter, Is modelling elements and specific events (art motifs) the combination of a kind of modelling material, it comes from the artist's life, is the artist accumulated in life has not through art processing transformation of original living materials, after painter choice, refining and design and become a picture image of objective things, including characters, animals, trees, flowers, landscape, symbols and other kinds of material, it contains the specific objective material form, also meet the needs of heme emotional consciousness. In this way, the form based on the material level is called subject matter or material; that based on the emotional level is called process. As Panowski said, the connotation of the theme is only the primary natural theme, while the design and expression of the secondary theme completely entirely on the active participation of the creator. In fact, in Panowski's book *The Meaning of Visual Art*, he distinguishes the theme from the subject matter, and Fu Zhiqiang, the Chinese translation of the book, directly translated the primary and second "Theme" into subject matter, which is in fact close to the artistic creators' understanding of the concept of subject matter. (Erwin, 1987)

5.1.1.1 Subject Ratter Category of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

According to the number and functional expression of various images of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, the seven categories of subject matter are properly classified and merged: the characters include all kinds of gods and mythological figures. The number of houses and artifacts is not large. Although it partly reflects the life and customs of the ancestors of Cangyuan, according to the phenomenological principle of Edmund Husserl "back to things themselves", we should directly focus on the direct experience of the visual aesthetic level, and should not be covered by the concepts preset by other disciplines. As the artistic aesthetic houses and objects, the aesthetic

way of judgment is a direct, holistic and subjective way of judgment, rather than a way of experience, decomposition and analysis, houses and utensils are more as the site and background of the activities of characters, and they show the subject of people. Therefore, the houses and utensils are ignored, thus forming the judgment and three categories of division of subject matter in Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

5.1.1.1.1 Figure Subject Matter

The figure subject matter is the dominant type of subject matter in the images of the Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Through the classification and design of figure subjects, the creators have categorized figures by gender, identity, and function, presenting a basic picture of prehistoric Cangyuan society. This highlights how Cangyuan rock art achieves diverse narrative purposes through the variety of figure types, as well as the breadth and depth that can be achieved in image storytelling centered on figures. It enriches and broadens the expressive capabilities of figure subjects.

5.1.1.1.2 Animal Subject Matter

The animal subject matter in Cangyuan Rock Paintings can be categorized into three types: some appear as hunting targets, others as domesticated objects, and still others interweave with human figures to depict the environment of human activities. This not only highlights the close connection between animals and human production activities but also may help explain the specific content of the rock painting narratives. Although animals serve as supporting roles and lack the diverse forms found in figure subjects, their use enriches the elements of rock paintings, contributing to a more dynamic and vivid visual effect.

5.1.1.1.3 Symbol Subject Matter

Although the symbol class subject matter occupies a small proportion in the whole number of images of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, according to the classification view of Emanuel Anati, they belong to the ideographic and psychological writing system, and play a key role in the expression of thee. However, there is no special study on the purpose of the use of symbol subject matter and the specific meaning of its transmission. A small number of scholars have explored graphics,

semitics, ancient philology and other aspects, and the conclusions are difficult to convince most people. In fact, as early as the “Shangshan Culture” period in China (approximately 10,000 to 8,500 years ago), there were already some engraved symbols on pottery. The interpretation methods proposed by folk scholars for ancient Chinese characters and their interpretation of the *Cangjie Book* created by Cang Jie (circa 2647 BC-2576 BC) have overturned people’s previous understanding of symbols. Also indirectly proves the correctness of Emmanuel Ananti’s view, it shows that Cangyuan Rock Paintings in the selection of characters, animals, symbols of these three subject matter for the real purpose of modeling, in terms of the visual effects, Is the modeling elements can be rich, the picture composition is more rich change. From the expression level, it is to complete the main idea that is difficult to present through symbols. From the picture situation of the symbol, the symbol does carry the most hidden part of the picture narrative.

5.1.1.2 The Subject Matter Features of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

The characters are the protagonists in the social life of the ancestors of Cangyuan. All activities are based on the starting point and ultimately people. The rock paintings should express human life and human world, and the subject matter is naturally the main body of man.

5.1.1.2.1 Narrative Features

Humans are products of society; not only do human production activities have social characteristics, but all human life behaviors also possess social attributes. The creators of the Cangyuan Rock Paintings viewed themselves and their surroundings from a human perspective, making “human” the central subject of all activities and the most direct visual symbol in all events. The events depicted in the rock paintings are about people, and any significance of these events arises from human existence. Humans are both the subjects of events and the material entities that constitute them.

Wang Ningsheng once asked from the purpose of painting and its social role, “why do we paint figures, animals, hunting, war, dance and other pictures on the cliff? What ideology is this based on? What was the role in people’s social life at that

time?” (Ningsheng, 1985) He believed that the records of witchcraft activities, rituals of praying for fertility, worship of gods, myths and legends, and major events are the practical significance of the emergence of rock paintings. In his article *The Narrative Archetype of Yunnan Rock Paintings*, Deng Qiyao also interpreted the narrativity of Yunnan rock paintings. He said that in order to make their history immortal and hope that the factual narratives or mythologized histories would be passed down from generation to generation, the ancient people, in the absence of written language, painted the life they saw and the orally transmitted culture onto the green mountains, which became a special way for ancient groups or people in remote and secluded areas to record and narrate their past. (Qiyao, 2002)

The original function of rock art, as it exists throughout the world, is narrative. Gai Shanlin's summarization of the functions of Chinese rock paintings also points to the existence of such narratives: simulation of the practice of sorcery, objects of sacrifice and worship, records of important events or rituals, transmission of knowledge, and accounts of myths and legends. (Shanlin, 1997) It is just that there are different ways of presenting this narrative by spatial zones, by temporal logic, and by pictorial relationships, and there are rock paintings of different stylized styles in different regions. The narrative approach of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, which is based on the logic of time coupled with the associative relationship of images, is more reflective of its original instrumental significance as a record, which is also an inevitable explanation of the narrative character of Cangyuan Rock Paintings' subject matter.

5.1.1.2.2 Life Characteristics

The rock paintings of Cangyuan depict human life, recording and expressing the desire to pass on one's life experiences. This aligns with the ancient Chinese text *The Book of Changes* (Zhouyi), which states that Baoxi Shi “By observing the changes of the things around us and the vast universe. To evolved Eight Trigrams, use to communicate the virtues of the gods, analogy to the changes of everything in the world”. The approach to obtaining themes and their purposes are consistent: Baoxi Shi derived materials and methods from the most familiar objects around him and from

things related to the theme in nature, using them to understand and explore the world. Similarly, the creators of Cangyuan rock paintings choose subjects from their immediate surroundings for their works.

The main body of the rock paintings in Cangyuan is different categories of people engaged in farming, herding, hunting, war and worship. They are the concrete representation of the diversified social structure and division of labor in ancient Cangyuan society. Through their own social production activities, they jointly create the economic and cultural appearance of Cangyuan society.

5.1.2 Research Conclusions on the Figure Modeling of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Modeling is the process of conceptualizing and shaping the scheme of a piece of work. On one hand, it involves materials, plans, and techniques, which are technical applications and implementation of organizing basic elements such as points, lines, and planes. On the other hand, it concerns formal principles, language use, and thematic significance, addressing issues of proportion, structure, form, and effect. In summary, modeling is the process of conception, design, and production, using visual elements to follow formal principles and transform conceptual ideas into tangible images according to certain aesthetic demands. This process involves formative languages like points, lines, planes, color, texture, light and shadow, as well as formal elements such as perspective, shape, structure, space, and composition.

The figure modeling of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, based on the precise selection of modeling language and formal elements, constitutes the most design-conscious and aesthetic characteristics of the figures in the prehistoric rock paintings in southwest China and even the whole of China. Such typical stylized and symbolic rock painting modeling is rare in other parts of the world at the same time.

5.1.2.1 The Categories of Human Figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings

The human figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings have some visual characteristics such as gender, age and identity, but they generalize and refine the form of the object. The geometric and planar design of the human body constitutes the

abstract and symbolic tendency of the language design of human figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, which is fundamentally different from the figurative modeling.

This treatment and result reflect the subjective design consciousness of the rock painting authors in terms of modeling, which completely surpasses the characteristics of the so-called simple modeling and immature technique in the stage of pure naturalism, and shows the artistic level of the rock painting figures in the aspect of imagistic modeling.

Imagistic modeling is an ancient artistic tradition of the Chinese nation, which has always believed that “beauty” lies in the realm of “likeness and unlikeness”. Archaeological evidence shows that the stone human face modeling from the Xinglongwa Culture dating back about 8,000 years, the jade modeling from the Hongshan Culture 6,000 years ago, the human face and fish pattern modeling from the Banpo site, and the bronze modeling from the Sanxingdui Culture dating back about 4,000 years all exhibit the stylistic characteristics of imagistic modeling.

Since Shen Hao of the Ming Dynasty (1586—1661) proposed the theory of “Seemingly similar yet dissimilar, dissimilar yet seemingly similar” in his landscape painting treatise *Hua Zhu*, categorizing and summarizing the traditional Chinese modeling art into imagistic modeling, Shi Tao of the Qing Dynasty (1642—1708) further elaborated on the rationale of imagistic modeling with his landscape painting inscription: “Famous mountains allow touring but not necessarily painting; if a painting must resemble the mountains, the mountains will appear grotesque. Amidst the magical transformations and bewilderment, the ‘dissimilarity that is similarity’ commands reverence”. He advocated the aesthetic standard of “worship the dissimilarity that is similarity”. Subsequent generations saw Qi Baishi (1864—1957) stating, “The essence of painting lies between similarity and dissimilarity; too similar is vulgar, too dissimilar is deceitful”. Huang Binhong (1865—1955) also noted, “paintings that are entirely similar or entirely dissimilar to objects are both fraudulent; only those that are both similar and dissimilar are true paintings”. These remarks from renowned artists have pushed the traditional Chinese theory and paradigm of imagistic modeling to an extreme.

In fact, the concept of “imagistic” encompasses two levels: one is “yi(意)” (meaning or intention), and the other is “xiang(象)” (form or image). Here, “xiang” refers to the modeling form, but this “xiang” is different from its original form. It is a “xiang” imbued with the painter’s subjective expressive intent and carries a certain degree of abstraction. It is a transformed “xiang”. The basis for this transformation is “yi”. Under the guidance and control of “yi”, the original form is altered to create this new “xiang”. “yi”, often also referred to as “Theme” (or “yi xiang”), represents the author’s subjective desires and expressions. Under this premise, the objective original form loses its dominant position in the realm of figurative modeling and instead becomes a tool serving the author’s thematic expression under the author’s subjective wishes. The modeling form that is shaped under the dominance of this “yi” is the “imagistic” form that exists relative to the figurative and abstract.

The focus of imagistic modeling is on the element of “yi” (meaning or intention). Confucius (551–479 BC), the ancient Chinese sage, when interpreting the *Ching* (Book of Changes), mentioned that “The sage establishes images to fully express the meaning”. Zhuangzi (c. 369–286 BC) in his *Qi Wu Lun* (Discussion on Making All Things Equal) stated, “words are used to clarify the image; once the image is grasped, the words can be forgotten. The image is used to preserve the meaning; once the meaning is understood, the image can be forgotten”. These statements all illustrate that the purpose of imagistic modeling is to achieve the expression of the theme, to allow people to understand the deeper connotations of “yi” through the modeling, and in this way, the modeling fulfills its mission. “yi” encompasses four distinct thematic levels: “event”, “emotion”, “spirit”, and “life”. “event” represents the most fundamental significance of what the image records, reflects, or expresses. The inquiry into and expression of the essential meaning of life in all things is the height that the art of imagistic modeling aspires to reach.

Cangyuan Rock Paintings are neither imitations of natural images nor pure abstract expressions of point and line elements, but are the result of careful design. Through the depiction of daily life scenes such as hunting, sacrificial

ceremonies, wars, and dances, Cangyuan ancestors' themes about life and survival are conveyed. They convey the themes of life and survival of the ancestors of Cangyuan through the depiction of daily life such as hunting, worship, war and dance. Many studies regard hunting, grazing, worship, war and dance as the subject matter, but in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, they have been the most basic thematic images.

5.1.2.2 Figure Modeling Types of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Previous research has shown that the triangular human torso symbol is one of the widely recognized features of the Cangyuan rock art figures. The Cangyuan rock art not only uses triangles but also trapezoids and various variations of these symbols. These symbols form over 700 figure images representing different identities and social classes in prehistoric Cangyuan society. This is not only the basis for the narrative of Cangyuan rock paintings, but also the extremely simplified symbolic modeling language makes it a model of minimalism in prehistoric modeling art.

Arnheim has a quote about minimalism. He said: "in an absolute sense, an object is simplified when it contains only a few structural features; in a relative sense, an object is said to be simplified when it organizes complex materials into an orderly whole with as few structural features as possible." (Arnheim, 1998) This view can be used as a footnote to the minimalist modeling of the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Through the minimalist treatment of the figures, a set of modeling prototypes is designed for the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, through which various possibilities of the modeling of the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings are obtained.

5.1.2.2.1 Figure Modeling Prototype

The existence of figure modeling prototypes is an innovative approach in the design of figures depicted in Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Compared to prehistoric rock paintings from other regions around the world, it stands as a highly conscious example of rock painting design. It symbolizes and standardizes images, making narrative storytelling feasible. More importantly, it lays the foundation for the richness of rock painting characters and their artistic expression.

5.1.2.2.2 Special Types of Figure Modeling

Although there are many figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, they can be classified into nine types according to their differences in form, decoration and dynamics, which basically cover the whole picture of the figure modeling in Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Among them, Types I to VII form a group with a clear evolutionary logic in terms of the body shape. Types VIII and IX are more special; if Type VIII is an “old scarecrow” image, it should belong to the object category rather than the human category. Type IX is an isolated case, lacking comparable reference objects for analysis.

The seven basic types of figures, namely types I to VII, are the most creative and successful language design of the authors of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, which not only reflect the personnel structure and social labor division in prehistoric Cangyuan society, but also reflect the openness and diversity of artistic forms as a form of modeling art.

5.1.2.2.3 The Significance of Various Figure Types

The seven types of human figures depicted in the Cangyuan Rock Paintings categorize various characters from Cangyuan society according to their status, position, and occupation. This clearly presents the structural form of prehistoric Cangyuan society, the characteristics of people in different social strata, and the division of labor. It also fully demonstrates the high level of artistic expression and character creation in Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Hegel believed that “The emergence of artistic types is due to different ways of grasping ideas as the content of art, thus leading to different images through which these ideas manifest. Therefore, artistic types are merely various relationships between content and image, which actually arise from the idea itself, providing a true basis for distinguishing artistic types”.(Hegel, 2006) The differences in the image types of Cangyuan Rock Paintings are precisely due to the different theme needs of the picture, and the different image types are the reaction of the different “Concept” needs.

Wang Ningsheng pointed out that most of the rock paintings in Cangyuan belong to the religious rituals left behind, when there was a certain social organization, a secular or religious leaders, there are prayers for a good harvest of sacrifices, there is a simulation of sorcery, as well as the worship of a variety of natural objects and so on. Many religious events were characterized by performances or mass dances.(Ningsheng, 1985) On the basis of Wang Ningsheng's analysis, Gai Shanlin put forward the viewpoint that "The picture reflects the social landscape of the ancient Cangyuan region in a more comprehensive way in terms of social life, science and culture, and ideology".(Shanlin, 2001)

Different human forms present a social system composed of ethnic or tribal leaders, shamans, organizers of production activities, and ordinary people in a more realistic way. This system revolves around production and life. At the same time, through such diverse forms, the richness of the artistic language system of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is created.

5.1.2.3 Characteristics of Figure Modeling in Cangyuan Rock Paintings

The character modeling and identity of the rock paintings in Cangyuan are closely related to each other, and together they constitute the narrative task of the rock paintings. The rock paintings show that the characters are the characters in specific events and the protagonists at different levels in the events. They carry different contents and structures of the text and reflect the theme expression of different levels of the text. Therefore, this different type of character modeling design is not solely subject to the needs of the contrast of picture elements, but from the perspective of enriching the expression scope of modeling language and expression ability.

Through specific language design, the author of rock paintings has formed a set of expressive language system of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, which reflects the consciousness of Cangyuan ancestors' painting modeling and aesthetic consciousness. In addition to satisfying the narrative function, the character modeling also reflects the author's consciousness and ability of destroying the natural order of the subject matter and consciously reconstructing the new form. In an article titled *African*

art and Cubism Written by D. H. Kahnweiler, an early patron of Cubist painters, he stated: “The Cubists saw in African art their own concept of art as a self-sufficient object—African art necessarily employs symbols both in its overall form and in the details of all its components”. (Junying, 2009) This emphasizes not only the question of the authenticity and self-sufficiency of the shapes pursued by the Cubists, but also points to the question of the production of a new structural concept or structural form, that of the use of symbolic elements.

The symbolic use in African art and the symbolic treatment of human figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, despite being separated by thousands of years, both demonstrate a subjective and proactive consciousness in the reconstruction of form, as well as the resulting outcomes. This shows that the human figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings possess a timeless sense of fashion and modernity. “primitive art presents a bizarre yet fascinating appearance, as it takes its first faltering steps toward highly developed narrative art”. (Blocker, 1991) The human figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings do not reflect the maturity of narrative ability, but rather the historical height that the form itself has achieved.

5.1.2.3.1 Figure Modeling Language in Cangyuan Rock Paintings

The modeling language is based on the modeling elements, and after the modeling elements become the components of the picture image, they are transformed into the work or the author’s modeling language. This is the modeling means and technique system formed by the artist’s systematic design of the modeling elements according to his personal habits, creative techniques and creative needs. For example, point, line, surface, shape, color, structure, light and shade, space, material, texture and so on are the basic modeling elements, further based on the need of specific expression of the point, line, surface and other elements to form the picture form, the elements in this kind of picture become the modeling language of specific works and painters.

Language is a symbolic expression system that is personalized and standardized. If we only look at the universal elements of dots, lines and surfaces, the language of Cangyuan Rock Paintings' figure modeling is only about dots, lines and surfaces. When discussing the modeling elements of Chinese rock paintings, Zhu Yuan takes the three forms of "dots, lines, and surfaces" as the basic shaping elements of rock paintings and argues that "Chinese rock paintings of the primitive period used these three shaping elements in a balanced way and expressed the aesthetic characteristics of the primitive people's paintings in the application of these three shaping elements. and in the use of these three conformational elements, the aesthetic characteristics of primitive paintings were expressed. The formal independence of the conformational elements of Chinese rock paintings indicates that Chinese rock paintings have independent aesthetic connotations".(Yuan, 2013) The human figures depicted in Cangyuan Rock Paintings differ from those in rock art elsewhere, primarily through further personalized design of points, lines, and planes, resulting in a highly standardized geometric and symbolic form system. The character modeling of Cangyuan Rock Paintings uses these forms to constitute various kinds of characters. Different combinations of these characters further construct different picture narrative forms, highlighting the powerful function of this kind of elements as the modeling language.

5.1.2.3.2 The Stylization of Figure Modeling Language

The figure modeling language of Cangyuan Rock Paintings has the characteristics of stylized style. Stylization is based on certain design purposes. It generalizes and abstracts the graphics of natural forms to form standardized modeling units that have a certain standard pattern and meet the needs of the technological process. Its purpose is to use the stylized language to achieve the text organization, editing to complete the need of expression. In this sense, language is the means, and expression is the purpose. With this standardized and stylized language paradigm, Cangyuan Rock Paintings successfully make a complete description of the events,

thoughts or some spirits that the author wants to record and inherit through the rock paintings.

As for paradigms, Anati says that a paradigm is an element that exists in all categories: the same themes, combinations, genres, techniques, locations, etc., in rock art around the world, "They show the standards of behavior that may contain meaning".(Anati, 2017) Anati is committed to establishing a set of systematic rock painting analysis modes based on "Theme, combination, genre, technique, and location" that can define combination, composition, and scene, that is, the basic paradigms of rock paintings defined by him. The language unit of his rock paintings is the elements of "Theme, combination, genre, technique and location", and these basic paradigms of Cangyuan Rock Paintings' figure modeling are only limited to the level of figure modeling, and the elements involved are likewise limited to the elements of "points, lines and surfaces".

In the paradigm of figure modeling in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, the key elements existing in all categories are the symbol forms of the trunk and lower limbs of the characters, which are the most basic and core language units of each paradigm.

The five paradigms of figure modeling in Cangyuan Rock Paintings show that the author of rock paintings has a subjective and dynamic consciousness of modeling design at the modeling level, and has the consciousness of selecting appropriate themes and appropriate modeling elements for image expression around the theme. Compared with the rock paintings in other places, Cangyuan Rock Paintings are not simply an expression of a wish to obtain prey. The main picture reflects all aspects of people's life at the sociological level.

The stylization of the modeling language also indicates that the author's understanding of modeling has gone beyond the specific depicted images themselves and risen to the level of regarding them as a symbolic expression system. The language system of Chinese paintings in later generations is a very mature programmed language, which is already a fully expressive language rather than a narrative or descriptive language. Therefore, it can be said that Cangyuan Rock

Paintings are no longer primitive and childish naturalistic paintings, but expressionistic works full of design consciousness, which no longer express the real world of characters, but organize an event through the editing of these programmed images of characters to express a theme about life.

5.1.2.3.3 The Symbolization of Figure Modeling Language

The interpretation process of the character modeling language from image to figure and then to symbols highlights the subjective and active rational thinking of the character modeling language.

Image is the most commonly used information carrier in human social activities, which is used for a kind of description or photo of objective objects. It mainly contains the relevant information belonging to the description object, etc. People can understand and grasp the object through the acquisition and identification of these information. The figure is the morphological description after the double generalization of the image form and information. Compared with the image, the information contained in the figure is more universal and abandons the particularity. Graphics are more inclined to be stylized, more standardized and subjective. Symbols, including verbal symbols and non-verbal symbols, here refers to non-verbal symbols, that is, the symbol system including visual symbols. Symbol is a carrier used to refer to and represent a certain kind of things, it carries the information sent by both sides of the communication, and it is a kind of imagery information sign recognized by both sides of the communication. Symbol is a further abstraction of figure, people can recognize things and express their thoughts and feelings through the reference and energy of symbols.

The result of the stylization of the modeling language will inevitably lead to a process in which the modeling language gradually breaks free from the constraints of the original images and ultimately moves towards symbolization. This is determined by the purpose of achieving narration from the very beginning of the creation of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. The process of change from images to figure and then to symbols is a process in which recording tools are gradually simplified and interpreted from visual images to abstract concepts. It is also a process of continuous

standardization, convenient and efficient recording methods. Of course, for Cangyuan Rock Paintings, they always only from figure to symbols, still belong to the category of figure symbols, but not really into the sequence of language symbols. However, it is this process of image symbol that marks a leap of the human thinking that people narrate through image symbols. Since then, human beings gradually change from living in the real nature to living in the symbolic world woven by themselves.

According to Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), this symbolic drive is a system that humans possess independently. In his book *An Essay on Man*, he states that compared to other animals, a distinctive feature of humans is the possession of a symbolic system in addition to the receptor and effector systems that all animals have. Cassirer further asserts that symbolic thinking and symbolic behavior are the most representative features of human society, and the entire development of human culture depends on these conditions, a point that is indisputable. (Cassirer, 2004)

Cassirer's theory of the symbolic system, although encompassing the entirety of human "language, myth, art, and religion", is directed towards "All progress that humans achieve in thought and experience". However, as a part of prehistoric human art and as an objective existence of prehistoric humans' attempts to narrate through these images, this theory in fact provides the material basis for the intrinsic drive of symbolic thinking, namely human nature. In other words, the tendency to symbolize everything is a result of human nature. People always attempt to describe things through language and to present things through images. The further simplification, standardization, and symbolization of images are all aimed at making the act of presentation more convenient and efficient, and to more fully and richly convey the intended narrative.

The stylization and symbolization of the figure modeling language in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, from an artistic perspective, represent an exaggerated way of dealing with the rock painting modeling language. Although this exaggeration makes the figures deviate from reality, the narratives constructed by them are the truest portrayal of the lives of the ancestors in Cangyuan. This is exactly where the rock

paintings can provide a sense of simplicity and strong expressiveness artistically at the visual level.

5.1.3 Research Conclusions on the Structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Structure, understood in terms of the Chinese word formation, is a compound word made up of “Jie” (to connect) and “gou” (to construct). “Jie” refers to the path or method of solving a problem, that is, the specific means of combining multiple different visual elements or modeling units together. “gou” refers to the visual outcome obtained after the elements or modeling units are combined through specific methods of connection. In summary, structure is a pattern or framework that organizes and unites various visual elements through the means of “Jie”. It is the combination of the layout and arrangement of various visual elements and directly affects the form of the modeling. The rationality of structure requires that the elements that make up a work, such as lines, shapes, colors, and spaces, which interact with each other, should conform to the logic of visual perception. It demands not only attention to the surface layout (i.e., composition) but also to the intrinsic order among the elements.

The cognitive structure theory of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget holds that “A structure is a schema system composed of several laws with integrity and having the nature of self-adjustment”. It can be clearly seen that there are three major characteristics of a structure: integrity, regularity (transformability), and self-adjustability. (Piaget, 2006)

The overall characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings are reflected in the picture narrative form composed of various types of character modeling, and in the content of interrelated and combined events. According to Piaget’s expression of wholeness, although the elements involved in the structure are independent, they are governed by certain laws on the whole, follow the laws and obey the requirements of the whole. The wholeness does not depend on the nature of each component, nor is it the result of their simple addition, but depends on the law of the interrelated composition of each component. Just as the limbs of people are subordinate to the whole and cannot be independent of the human body, we can interfere, adjust or even recombine the

parts of the events reflected in the rock paintings, but it does not affect the structure and performance of the rock paintings.

Different from Piaget's cognitive structure, since the formation of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, their modeling structure is no longer bound by the original author and becomes relatively fixed and static. In the later period, the structure of the rock paintings affected the destruction of the rock paintings caused by time and nature. This can also be regarded as the influence of external factors on the subject and leads to the change and reorganization of the subject structure.

As a symbol in the whole system, the relationship between them forms a structure, and the meaning is constructed through the relationship between the symbol system and the symbol. Arnheim argues, "the essence of all art forms is that they convey some meaning. Any form should convey a meaning far beyond the form itself". (Arnheim, 1998) The purpose of the analysis and judgment of the structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is to master the structural law and aesthetic expression of the image level of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

5.1.3.1 Image Structure Type of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

According to the integrity of the picture form, the independence of the narrative and other factors, the structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings has different types. In general, the picture form and the narrative are interrelated. If the narrative is complete, the picture composition is relatively complete; if the narrative is incomplete, the picture composition may be scattered and disorderly. Of course, the damage of the image in time also has a profound impact on the image structure.

5.1.3.1.1 Type 1 Structures

There are seven basic types of type 1 structures, which cover the picture forms of all the locations of the rock paintings. Relying on these seven basic structures, the rock paintings can choose and combine different modeling elements respectively, forming a picture effect of various shapes and forms. With the richness of the structure, there is the diversity of picture forms. The trinity of elements, structure and forms forms the basic core of the aesthetic form of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

5.1.3.1.2 Type 2 Structures

Type 2 structures take the rock painting and the cliff wall as a whole, and take the possession, segmentation and utilization of the cliff wall as a part of the picture structure. Compared with the first type of structure, the second type of structure has the characteristics of conversion structure similar to Piaget. Through the use of cliff wall and picture segmentation, the picture has expanded the modeling elements, basic units, theme content, space effect and other aspects, and become complex and profound. Therefore, the scene-style composition becomes a prominent feature of this kind of structure.

5.1.3.2 Structural characteristics of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Structure is the basic way of the existence of things, it is the existence and services for the modeling, what kind of structure, must be reflected in the shape of the requirements of the structure, the two are dependent on each other, together constitute the basic elements of the form of the work, determine the quality of the work.

Symbol system, spatial layout (i. e., composition form), theme content, all constitute the basic elements of the structure. Symbol system refers to all visual image data at the material level, is the basic modeling elements including points, lines, surface, color, which constitute the specific visual form; spatial layout refers to the framework level of the structure, including the coordination of the relationship between the integrity and the internal units; the theme includes the theme inside and outside the picture, it is the value of the structure.

5.1.3.2.1 Diversity of Structural styles

Through the ages, one of the core characteristics of art is the refusal to repeat. Generations of excellent artists neither repeat themselves nor repeat The Times, which has made the splendid history of human image art for ten thousand years.

As a language with a stylized and symbolized expression system, Cangyuan Rock Paintings could have achieved narration according to the usual organizational pattern of language. However, beyond this stylized language system, the creators of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, through their pursuit of the composition of the paintings, presented that within the narrative level of the rock paintings, a stylized language was used to create a

non-stylized structural design. This enabled Cangyuan Rock Paintings to ultimately return from the functional level of narration to the aesthetic level of artistry.

The rich variety of structures precisely demonstrates that the creation of rock paintings is not restricted by fixed patterns, but rather emphasizes the freedom and artistry of expression. This also reflects the cognitive structure of the ancient people.

5.1.3.2.2 Spatiality of Structural Relationships

The spatiality of the structural relationship first stems from the spatiality of the structural elements. On the one hand, these elements originate from the cliff faces, the mountain massifs, and the entire natural environment. On the other hand, they are based on “The psychological reactions of the observers”. These two aspects jointly complete and strengthen the further enrichment and perfection of this spatial characteristic. (Arnheim, 1998)

The spatial structural elements of cliff wall, mountain and natural environment are generally regarded as the carriers of rock paintings. However, the actual situation of the full exploration and utilization of the cliff structure and texture of Cangyuan Rock Paintings shows that the active thinking and utilization of such elements shows that Cangyuan Rock Paintings have broken through the specific plane carrier in the treatment mode and concept of the picture carrier. As the carrier of images, the rock painting author becomes the space of image activities, and regards the cliff wall as a real world of the activities of rock paintings, which is the introduction of a spiritual space unprecedented in rock paintings in other areas.

The authenticity of the texture and undulating changes of the cliff base surface, the illusory nature of the space where the figures are depicted as active, and the fact that people consider this natural environment as a passage for spirits and a place that ordinary people should not easily set foot in all endow these elements with the meaning of a spiritual space. This significantly reinforces people's awareness of this spiritual space structure.

Each tiny existence within this structure embodies the holographic nature of the universe, meaning that information about the cosmos is encoded in every small thing. By touching, observing, or analyzing each tiny existence, people can gain understanding and insight into the entire universe or larger systems, as well as achieve connections, influences, and communications between them, achieving a dissolution and unification of things and people. This structural characteristic reflects Cangyuan ancestors' contemplation and exploration of the natural universe, their understanding and reverence for the complexity of this world.

5.1.3.2.3 Temporality of the Structural Elements

Heinrich Wölfflin argued: "The history of form has never been in a state of rest. There are times when it has an impulse to accelerate, and there are times when it engages in slow imaginative activity. But even in the latter case, a constantly repeated ornament will gradually change its appearance. Nothing can retain its effect forever. What seems lively today may not seem so lively tomorrow". (Wölfflin, 2004) Although Wölfflin was discussing the evolution of artists and their styles, the form of an artwork is both a manifestation of style and a manifestation of internal structure. Changes in form lead to changes in style, and the root of the changes in both form and style lies in the internal structure of the work. When the structure changes, the forms and styles that represent it also change accordingly. There are only two reasons for the change in structure: one is the reconstruction of artistic form brought about by the artist's own change in understanding; the other is the factor of time.

Jean Piaget believed that the transformation of structures can be non-temporal or temporal. "If these structures did not have such transformations, they would be confused with any static forms and would lose all their explanatory power for things". (Piaget, 2006) Cangyuan Rock Paintings exemplify a temporal system of structural transformation, where the participation of time both disrupts and reconstructs the structural forms of the paintings.

The carving and erosion of time makes the structure of the rock paintings become a dynamic change rather than a static form. This structural change brings the body from the original complete to incomplete, and then forms the integrity or incomplete of a new structure and a new image form. Once the image (or form) is formed, the element of time will actively participate in and even become an inseparable component of the form structure, which is another kind of structural element that time gives the original author unable to design and give.

Mottled, magma erosion, mutilated and other words are the most frequently mentioned words in the description of Cangyuan Rock Paintings images, just as the antique market will be the surface of the artifacts due to a long-time play, oxidation of the luster formed by the “patina”, the people of this by the precipitation of the years and obtain the ancient, old, stable, mature as antique artifacts Unique artistic temperament. The dynamic nature of time determines the continuity and durability of the connotation it gives to the object. The longer the time, the more humanistic and artistic value the object has, and the more it can radiate its influence to a wider range. For Cangyuan Rock Paintings, the participation of more than three thousand years of time, as well as the natural changes and the precipitation of humanistic contents given to it by time have greatly enriched and broadened the structure and connotation of the rock paintings as a valuable resource.

Of course, the presentation form of time is the mottling and mutilation of rock paintings images, which is specifically manifested by wind and rain, magma erosion, and weathering and shedding of the cliff wall. The effect of the presentation of time is the collapse of the structure of rock paintings, the destruction of the form, the completion of an independent form of life must go through. Understanding and recognizing this point, one understands that the blurring and indistinguishability of the rock paintings' images as well as their mutilation is the function of the structural element of time, and also the artistic characteristic that time gives to them. In this way, one will not be obsessed with the clarity of the image of the rock paintings, will not try to repair

and perfect its defects and ambiguities, and will not try to investigate the specific connotations of the missing parts.

Undeniably, in addition to changes, the structure always has local relative stability, so that the structure has the basis for analysis. The linguistic structure of Saussure(A Swiss linguist and semiologist) and the view of rock paintings as a recording tool of the ancients can also be studied as a language. Of course, no matter whether structuralism exists or not, the internal structural relationship of things has existed since the beginning of their existence, which is also the reason why we understand and appreciate things through the analysis of structure.

5.1.4 Research Conclusions on the Theme Expression of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Cangyuan Rock Paintings are not freely accessible or viewable artworks; they mostly stand on steep cliffs, with standing spots that are extremely narrow and limited, making it impossible to meet the needs of viewing. This indicates that rock paintings are not for casual inspection. The selective nature of rock paintings highlights their uniqueness, as they do not merely record daily trivial matters. Placing them on high mountains and cliffs is, as Mr. Deng Qiyao said, a way for ancient people to “leave marks on wood and stone”, using green mountains as hiding places to preserve these worldly classics for future generations to read.

Cangyuan Rock Paintings are not only a text of image narrative, but also an expression of the attitude of Cangyuan ancestors towards life, survival and life through images. “Behind every rock painting is a story, a myth, a memory, or a plea to a prophet or God for rain or a perfect hunt”. (Anati, 2017) According to Anati, the rock paintings of prehistoric people had different social purposes and reflected their different social, psychological and conceptual needs. From these prehistoric rock paintings, one can see human “labor patterns, economic activities, social practices, aesthetic tendencies, philosophical thoughts, and the relationship between nature and the ‘supernatural’ environment”(Anati, 2019). As Anati points out, the rock paintings of Cangyuan are also a means for the ancestors of Cangyuan to clearly explain and reflect the world.

5.1.4.1 Theme Positioning of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

The study of the theme of Cangyuan Rock Paintings shows that the observation and analysis angles, understanding methods and degrees of researchers all determine the different possibilities of the results. One is the practical demands of life; the other is the demands of thought and spirit.

The rock paintings directly depict real-life contents or events such as herding, hunting, rituals, wars, dances, gathering, juggling, building, villages, nesting, etc., which can be visualized without too much thinking on the part of the viewer, and which reflect the real-life aspirations of the people at that time. The ideological and spiritual demands are hidden in rituals such as sorcery, sacrifices and festivals, and in the landscape made up of mountains, forests, fields, pedestrians, and the vast expanse of time. These contents have always attracted people to watch and ponder, and are also closer to the imagery expression of "Certain situations of the material and spiritual life of the ancient ancestors in Yunnan" mentioned by Deng Qiyao.

Facing the rock paintings, we naturally wonder: why do I come to see them? Is it to see the grazing, hunting and sacrificial scenes of the ancients? Or is it to meet, recognize and get to know these works that have carried more than 3,000 years of age, and feel the artistic charm that has been precipitated over thousands of years? I believe that modern people have their own pursuits and answers, and these answers are precisely the themes constructed between people and rock paintings, people and people, and people and social history.

Through the narration of daily hunting, grazing, domestication, gathering, games, fighting, farming, village, war, sacrifice, singing and dancing, acrobatics, nesting and rituals, the rock painting reflects the attention of Cangyuan ancestors to the importance of survival reality, ethnic reproduction and the desire for survival experience and inheritance of rules. They made use of environment, time, character modeling and other factors to build a world of divine life, to place some survival experience that they thought was extremely important, which formed a part of the spiritual world of Cangyuan ancestors.

5.1.4.1.1 The Main Theme of Survival composed by Humans and Objects

Religious rituals, hunting and production, resource competition, and harvest celebrations, these four types of activities represent the entirety of the survival practices of the ancestors in Cangyuan. In an era without writing, the ancestors of Cangyuan used their wisdom to create a series of stylized and symbolic images. What truly needed to be recorded was this collection of life experiences and lessons, about the joys and sorrows of living, always centered around the issue of individual and communal survival.

5.1.4.1.2 The Divine World of Life Constructed by Humans and Nature

The original intention of the people in Cangyuan to paint rock paintings on the mountains was to hide and protect the rock paintings with the help of the mountains and forests so as to achieve the purpose of inheritance. With the change of social environment, the rock paintings in Cangyuan have lost their practical value as a guide to experience. The images originally carrying information have returned to the dominant position of aesthetic subject, while the spiritual space once used as a protection barrier has settled down as the aesthetic core of modeling art. The worship of mountains and forests and the fear of the mysterious unknown world by prehistoric people are not only the basis for the proper preservation of rock paintings, but also provide the soil for the growth of many myths and legends derived from rock paintings. This cultural connotation is not only the result of the intentional shaping by the creators, managers and holders of rock paintings, but also the key for later generations to feel and experience rock paintings with their hearts —— It shows the life resonance between people and things in rock paintings, rock paintings and natural environment, and rock paintings and generations of worshippers across time and space.

5.1.4.2 The Carrier of the Theme expression of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

The narrative purpose of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is not to describe how dangerous and cruel hunting scenes are, but to record and transmit the knowledge and experience of organizing hunting activities through the editing of images. In this

way, hunting is not only recorded as an event, but also plays a role in carrying the theme through the organization of images.

Yang Xingji summarized the three themes of the rock paintings —— “labor, hunting and dance”, “life consciousness”, “Spirit and totem”. From this induction, we can see the clue of analysis according to a specific train of thought. (Xingji, 1995) The three artistic themes proposed by scholar Yu Fan, namely “The depiction of primitive living state and living situation (realistic picture)”, “The depiction of primitive witchcraft ritual scenes (illusory diagram)” and “The image depiction of the origin of ethnic groups (myth description)”, basically get rid of the classification idea of equate the carrier with the theme. (Fan, 2009)

The daily life scenes such as collection, farming, grazing, domestication, hunting, sacrifice, singing and dancing, acrobatics and ceremonies are regarded as the views of the ancestors of Cangyuan to express the two major themes of material and spiritual life, which helps us to further understand the expression theme of Cangyuan rock paintings. In other words, based on Pannovsky's iconographic theory, we can avoid limiting ourselves to a superficial interpretation of specific events such as hunting, break through the constraints of appearances, and gain insight into the essence of the theme of life in the rock paintings. This theory helps us to interpret, understand and appreciate the theme of the human mind contained in the third level of the image, and at the same time, we can also apply it to the practice of art creation and design.

5.1.4.3 Means of Theme Expression of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

The theme of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is divided into two levels, one is the event itself presented by the images, that is, the expression of the events of gathering, farming, herding, domestication, hunting, rituals, songs, dances, acrobatics, ceremonies, etc., which is the theme of the rock paintings as usually defined by the majority of the researchers, and the realization of this level is mainly realized by the system of the language of the picture. Secondly, through the carriers of collecting, farming, herding, domestication, hunting, rituals, songs and dances, acrobatics, ceremonies and other events, Cangyuan Rock Paintings really record and express the

ways and means of organizing and carrying out the production and life and certain basic principles, and further present the social conception and other spiritual pursuits that are related to the survival and reproduction of the communities. This level is mainly realized through the environmental language system.

5.1.4.3.1 Picture Language System

Color, modeling and composition form the basic system of picture language, and the joint effect of color, light efficiency, texture, modeling, perspective and composition, to complete the composition and narrative of the picture. Among them, modeling and composition, as the unique characteristic language of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, construct the hardware basis of the art narrative and aesthetic appreciation of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

5.1.4.3.2 Environmental Language System

According to Prof. Zhu Songqing of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, the environment is a conditioning factor for art works, and this factor “has a constraining effect on art, i.e., these environmental factors are the prerequisites or reasons for the works. This constraining effect is reflected in the creative intention, the creative process and the effect of the work”.(Songqing, 2015) The spatial structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings includes the elements of mountains and forests, gullies and mountains, and history, which are already part of the modeling in terms of the material properties of the art works. Only when these elements are incorporated into the whole modeling system of Cangyuan Rock Paintings can its spatial structure be truly structured, and it can also truly reflect the spatial form of Cangyuan rock painting art.

Prof. Zhu Songqing said: “whether we look at it from the practical or material scope of art, environment is the first material property of art. Every work of art needs the surrounding material conditions for its creation, existence and performance, which is called the environment of the work. The environment is a specific range of objects that match the author’s creative intent, the creative process and effect of the work; these objects exist in a relationship of mutual encirclement, support and assistance with the work, and sometimes are even organically integrated with the work, such as frescoes and the walls on which they are located”.(Songqing, 2015) Therefore, the images of

Cangyuan Rock Paintings, the cliffs, the mountains, the people, and the past years together constitute the core aesthetic expression part in the theme of Cangyuan rock painting art.

5.1.5 Research Conclusions on the Artistic style of Cangyuan Rock Paintings

Anadi believes that “The standards and perceptions of contemporary culture influence the assessment and appreciation of original artistic creativity. From individual to individual, from one culture to another. Aesthetic perceptions change, styles and interests shift, and we need to recognize the relationship of this change. When styles of petroglyphs are described as realistic, narrative, abstract, and symbolic, this terminology reflects our own level of understanding and cultural standards. Such standards are complex, dialectical and with a personal component”.(Anati, 2019) Wolfflin also said that the style of art mainly depends on personality, nationality and the spirit of the times.(Wolfflin, 2004) Personality is the temperament factor that constitutes style, while nationality and the spirit of the times are the regional and historical factors that constitute style. Strictly speaking, all three must be based on the modeling level, and style is essentially about the style of modeling. Some scholars point out: “The modeling style is a kind of personal use of language... Therefore, in intuition we can feel the isomorphic relationship between style and personality”.(Xinyu, 2014) The style of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is the result of the interaction of personality, space and time.

The personalized language design and application of the author is the material basis for the presentation of style. As for the problem of nationality in regionalism, we cannot use today's national concept to correspond to the prehistoric ancestors. The existence and expression of nationality are reflected in the author's personality and the regional environment and ethnic living habits. The spirit of the times is the theme expression problem made by the creator based on the specific events to be stated in the rock paintings. In *The Sociology of Art*, Arnold Hauser points out that the largest works of art are always in direct contact with the problems and tasks in real life, to find solutions to contemporary problems and to help people understand the situation where these problems are created. (Hauser, 1987)

The stylization and symbolic design of the images in Cangyuan Rock Paintings determines that the rock paintings in Cangyuan do not have realism but tend to decorative modeling style. The modeling language of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is essentially a tool for recording life. That is to say, its life-like characteristics have not changed because of decoration or abstraction. This is the style in which it has both abstract and realistic aspects, that is, the abstract form and realistic narrative.

5.1.5.1 Stylized Expressions of Human Life and Warmth

The discussion on the style of Cangyuan Rock Paintings based on their form (including compositional forms) and expression (or representation) aligns well with the three aspects of artistic style proposed by American art historian Meyer Schapiro: “Formal elements or motifs, formal relationships, and qualities (expression or expression)”. Shapiro says that his stylistic concepts stem from extensive research experience, “when linking artworks to individuals or cultures, these three aspects provide the broadest, most stable, and thus most reliable criteria”. (Schapiro, 2016)

The stylization and symbolization of the human figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings, as well as the decorative form; the narrative and concrete expression of the content, that is, the reality of the narrative, point to the modeling and expression of rock paintings.

5.1.5.1.1 Stylized formal expression

Cangyuan Rock Paintings have neither the mysterious wind of ghosts, gods and witches, and they are not entirely natural style, but realistic painting style restricted by certain utility under certain norms. On the one hand, this restriction comes from the design of modeling language, on the other hand, it comes from the selection results of the author's era and environment. “The artist does not depict everything he sees and knows; instead, there are clear choices. The subject matter varies with the changing times. They are often confined to their respective eras. The frequent appearance and concentration of certain subjects allow us to establish an initial system. The entire range of subjects is often clearly aligned with the patterns of specific cultures and tribes, and often requires the use of particular methods for painting, drawing, or engraving. At the same time, the subjects and styles often reflect the creator's profound motivations”. (Anati, 2019) Anadi from a large number of

concentrated and frequent description objects, is found that can establish a system based on a certain specification, and in the Cangyuan rock author, the large number of concentrated and frequent describe the object is not the main body, but a tool, is used to record, express Cangyuan ancestors social life of a stylized, symbolic image tools.

Arnold Hauser believes that Neolithic art belongs to the “geometric graphic style”, He said “Neolithic rock wall paintings used two or three simple geometric figures to create the figure, such as a vertical line to represent the trunk, an upward semicircle and a downward semicircle to represent the upper and lower limbs”. The reason is that human beings moved from the old Stone Age, which was dominated by hunting and prevailed in “Magic and naturalism”, to the Neolithic era, which was organized to solve livelihood problems with “Animism and geometric shapes”. This is what Hauser calls “geometric shapes”, or “symbols like pictographic writing”.(Hauser, 2015) This is also the characteristic of the stylized figure images in Cangyuan Rock Paintings. However, the stylized images in Cangyuan Rock Paintings differ slightly from Hauser’s view that “Art no longer represents the richness of life but attempts to capture certain ideas, concepts, and the essence of things —— it no longer imitates anything; it seeks symbolism”. The images in Cangyuan Rock Paintings aim to record and depict a segment of the lives of their creators, portraying their current state of existence. This is a process of summarizing and refining representational language, making it more standardized and symbolic, thus enhancing its function as a standardized symbol for recording and expression. This stylized image treatment demonstrates the designers’ awareness and capability in the design of visual language in Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

From the perspective of image expression language of Cangyuan Rock Painting, the significance of recording is much higher than the significance of images. The purpose of image simplification and stylized processing is to use it more conveniently and quickly, which can highlight the instrumental value of rock paintings as a life chronicle. By grasping this point, we can grasp the artistic style and value of the image language of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, and understand how to use the organizational logic of the composition level of rock paintings.

5.1.5.1.2 The Hustle and Bustle of Everyday Life

Cangyuan Rock Paintings are records and reflections of the lives of Cangyuan's early inhabitants. They are documentary (or narrative) artistic works created by the rock painters based on real life. While these documentary paintings may have served to tame certain animals or pray for successful hunting, they more often document the entire process of daily production and life activities. For example, the sacrificial scene in location 1 and Area 2 is for a certain purpose, but as a part of all the activities recorded by the whole wall rock paintings, it only means that the activity needs the sacrificial ceremony, and nothing more. What the rock paintings need to be conveyed to future generations should be the complete working process of all the activities and the problems that need to be paid attention to in the process.

Cangyuan Rock Paintings are not isolated from real life. The so-called ghostly existence is a kind of spiritual existence that the creators of rock paintings hope to achieve with the help of the environment and supplemented and perfected by the ordinary audience's fear of symbols. This information cascade effect, not only exists among the local people, but also affects some rock painting researchers engaged in sociology and folklore research through the spread of local culture, and then affects the cognitive attitude of the ordinary audience. This plays an extremely important role in the formation of the spiritual space of rock paintings.

Different from Hauser's view of "geometric graphic style", the rock paintings in Cangyuan are shaped by stylized and symbolic modeling language to create various figures in different geometric classes, showing the rich appearance of prehistoric social life in Cangyuan, which also shows that Hauser's theory of artistic style has certain limitations. From his "geometric graphic style", we will not be able to perceive the existence of concrete life represented by rock art, but only some abstract concepts, ideas or symbols, which is completely inconsistent with the concrete realistic narrative effect shown by Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Just as the real content of real life is written with more abstract words, this is not a problem of the abstraction of words as

symbols, but a problem of presenting the concrete or abstract objects when words are used as tools to record, describe or express objects.

5.1.5.2 Embodiment of Divine Spirit in Decoration

The rock paintings, which place the joys and sufferings of the ancestors' survival in the mountains and forests and on the cliffs, are themselves a kind of decorative behavior, and their purpose of passing on to future generations is the concrete embodiment of the spiritual pursuit of the ancestors.

The reason why people are human is that on the basis of universal humanity, people have the dream and pursuit of divine spirit. Divine spirit not only involves the inner quality of individuals, but also involves the depth and wisdom of the mind, as well as the understanding and experience of life and the universe. "Rock paintings are irreplaceable by anything else for a profound understanding of human spiritual life and cultural patterns. Long before the invention of writing, rock paintings were the earliest evidence of human imagination and artistic creation, forming the most universal part of human heritage". (Anati, 2019) Therefore, from the perspective of art vision, after the passage of time, the rock paintings in Cangyuan leave us more of the light of the modeling language that has been washed by the years, as well as the serious attitude of the ancestors towards life and their persistence in the continuation of life.

5.1.5.2.1 The Radiance of Decorative Modeling

As a representative of the symbolic modeling system, the decorative modeling language of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is extremely mature. In comparison, apart from some cultural types in mainland China that predate it by the Neolithic period and the contemporary Sanxingdui bronze culture, which can find some similar elements, other modeling arts rarely possess such a comparable level of maturity.

In the Chinese Neolithic period half slope painted pottery human face fish pattern (7000 years ago), Hongshan jade (6000 years ago), Liangzhu jade (5000 years ago), Sanxingdui bronze art (3500 years ago) and mature in the Qin and Han dynasties (2200 years ago) in the various types of Chinese paintings, can be seen that these types of imagery modeling art has a basic feature, that is they have to meet

the “between like and unlike” modeling needs of the design of a structured, standardized and systematic language of form. The basic characteristic of these types of imagery art is that they all have the design of a structured, standardized and systematic formal language to satisfy the stylistic needs of “between resemblance and non-resemblance”.

From the longitudinal perspective of the world’s prehistoric rock paintings history, according to Emanuel Anati’s classification, from the primitive hunter’s rock paintings to the food gatherer’s, evolved hunter’s, grazier’s, and composite economic rock paintings, we have not seen any rock paintings in any region that have such a standardized and expressive independent linguistic system as that of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Although Anati has made a classification design of “pictograph, Ideogram, and psychographic script” for the prehistoric rock paintings from a linguistic point of view, there is an unavoidable defect in this system, that is, once the keyword “ideographic” cannot be interpreted, all the work that follows will basically be conjectures. However, this system has an inescapable flaw, that is, once the keyword “ideogram” in a text cannot be interpreted, all subsequent work is basically conjecture.

Unlike the model explored by Anati, the key word in Cangyuan Rock Paintings is not “ideogram”, but “pictographs”. As the subject and central vocabulary of the Cangyuan petroglyph texts, “pictographs” not only retain and play a visual role as images, but also function as “ideographs” through the dynamics of the already symbolized images and their group processing. At this stage, at least two-thirds of the main idea of the text can be read, and at this point, whether or not the “psychographic script” can be interpreted has little impact on the understanding of the text at the intellectual level. Therefore, it can be seen that the language of Cangyuan Rock Paintings has a more complete, systematic and standardized structural system.

Of course, the decorative processing of language is originally to facilitate the expression of the main idea. When the stated content has lost its existing social environment and historical space, the function of this decorative language will be restored or transformed into the modeling meaning. Therefore, we will find that

Cangyuan Rock Paintings and contemporary art coincide in the symbolic treatment of the modeling language. This point reflects the aesthetic concept of “Art knows no past or present”. in the form level and the connotation level.

5.1.5.2.2 Building of the Spiritual World

Cangyuan Rock Paintings, a book about the life and survival of ancient people, is a summary and warning of their survival experience after generations of sacrifices in the struggle with the natural environment and wild animals. It is an explanation of their unknown world, which may contain more thoughts that we can no longer interpret. The mysterious barriers set up in Cangyuan Rock Paintings may have been set up at the beginning to protect the rock paintings and prohibit the contact of irrelevant people, so as to prevent the destruction of the rock paintings and the loss of their contents. For the vast majority of people, this is a mysterious and inaccessible forbidden land: it sets up obstacles in the natural environment, and more importantly, spreads the legends full of mystery and spiritual power to every corner through people's word of mouth, and extends the space of rock paintings to every place where spiritual power can reach.

The mystery of the artistic style of Cangyuan Rock Paintings does not come from the content expressed by the images, but from people's awe of the image symbols and fear of the natural forest. This psychology is constantly grown and artificially strengthened, and the spiritual space of rock paintings co-built by people and environment is further expanded and deified.

Professor Wang Defeng of Fudan University in Shanghai once said, “The future is the object of hope and fear”. This sense of uncertainty caused by the uncertainty of the future was particularly prominent among prehistoric people. The ancestors of Cangyuan Rock Paintings created their rock painting world with such a mentality, and through the help of those strange evil spirit phantom and mythological legends, they formed part of the mysterious and transcendent artistic aesthetic of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Therefore, “beauty” can be terrifying and grotesque. Fear is the closest observation and touch of people’s helpless life, and it is the most direct form of artistic expression of life.

The psychological response of humans to such mysterious and even terrifying things has always evolved from fear to desire, from the pursuit of psychological thrill to physical and mental enjoyment. In the Cthulhu Mythos system created by the famous American writer Howard Phillips Lovecraft, a profound, mysterious, and open dark world is constructed. This mythological system turns mystery and fear into an artistic beauty it strives to depict. Austrian poet R.M. Rilke also wrote: “Beauty is not something; it is merely the beginning of terror that we can bear”.(Rilke, 2009)

This kind of spatiotemporal art, which takes mystery and horror as its aesthetic objects, can find its basis in the emerging horror aesthetics of modern times. The horror aesthetics that expresses suffering or fear are rooted in people’s lack of security in the unknown world and the resulting sense of loneliness. Just as people cannot help but roar when they are extremely afraid, they hope to alleviate their tense psychological state through this means, bringing them strength, safety, and relief. This act itself is an artistic activity.

The combination of time and space generated by the rock paintings in Cangyuan also brings the aesthetic meaning of mystery and horror.

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1. The Construction Significance of the Artistic Dimension of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in Yunnan

The construction significance of the five artistic dimensions of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, such as subject matter, modeling, structure, theme and style, is mainly reflected in the following three aspects.

5.2.1.1 Cultural Significance

The prehistoric Cangyuan Rock Paintings, as records of the production and life of early inhabitants from over 3,000 years ago during the late Neolithic period, hold an extremely important place in the history of rock art both globally and in China.

These rock paintings document and reflect the living environments, lifestyles, social division of labor, and class differentiation of ancient people. They preserve cultural information such as the lifestyle, religious beliefs, and social structure of these early inhabitants, making them crucial physical evidence for studying the historical social structure and cultural forms of ancient Cangyuan. As part of cultural studies, they are an indispensable component of the artistic expression of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

Cangyuan Rock Paintings have the function of recording image symbols, but there is still a lot of work to be done to interpret the actions and thoughts of prehistoric people through these symbols, as well as the culture, origin and structure of prehistoric people derived from rock paintings.

5.2.1.2 The Significance of Design

The symbolic design of the human figure images in Cangyuan Rock Paintings has been universal in the application across scenes and carriers.

The design of modeling elements based on human figures has endowed the rock art images of Cangyuan with symbolic language, enabling them to transcend regions and scenes. These images have been widely applied in 17 known locations across nearly 2,500 square kilometers. Not only do they fulfill the theme of using rock art to narrate stories for the ancestors of Cangyuan, but they also achieve rapid documentation of ethnic information. The series of stylized and symbolic human designs have formed a paradigmatic system of prehistoric rock art language, creating a grand hall of prehistoric rock art design.

Professor Han Meilin, a senior professor at Tsinghua University and a Master of Chinese Arts and Crafts, has widely incorporated elements from ancient rock paintings in the Helan Mountains of Northern China into his artistic creations, including painting, sculpture, and craft art. He successfully brought ancient rock paintings into the contemporary art scene, creating a distinctive “Meilin Art Trend”. From his main works such as *Ancient Modern: Han Meilin Rock Painting Art Collection* and *Stone Soul Walks the Heart: Han Meilin Rock Painting Art Collection*, we can feel the inspiration of prehistoric rock painting to design and its profound influence on personal creation.

The design of the human figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings shows that the prehistoric people in Cangyuan already had very advanced design consciousness and ideas, making it an excellent case for the origin of design research, the expression of design, and the influence on contemporary design.

5.2.1.3 The Significance of Fine Arts

For the ancestors of Cangyuan, the rock paintings of Cangyuan do not have the attributes of painting works as we define today, but this does not prevent us from defining them from today's aesthetic perspective, nor does it prevent us from calling them works of art. Jane Block says that anthropologists do not consider primitive artifacts to be art because they are "not made with artistic or aesthetic intent, but are seen as part of a broader reflection on religion, agriculture, society, politics, etc". The root of this, according to Jane Block, is that with anthropologists, "The aesthetic element is either forgotten or overwhelmed by other visions".(Blocker, 1991)

As an art painting, the artistic significance of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is reflected in many aspects such as subject matter, modeling, structure, form, theme and style. Compared with the rock paintings of the same era, Cangyuan Rock Paintings show a very mature modeling consciousness and modeling ability that other regional rock paintings do not have. The creators have made a typological summary of the numerous figures in the prehistoric society of Cangyuan, forming a group of prehistoric rock paintings with standardized, stylized and minimalist modeling characteristics. This modeling style can be said to be the beginning of a minimalist language, and it is also in line with the aesthetic pursuit of contemporary society. This style circulation across thousands of years has far-reaching significance for the theoretical and practical exploration of minimalism.

Stepping into Cangyuan, facing these spirits that roamed the mountains and hills left by the prehistoric people, there will be a quiet beauty of mountain breeze blowing over the heart beyond a strong sense of rational distance. This may provide a new perspective and method for the artistic evaluation of prehistoric rock paintings.

5.2.2. Selection and Value of the Artistic Dimension of Cangyuan Rock Painting in Yunnan Province

5.2.2.1 Selection of Evaluation Dimensions

The five-dimensional artistic structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings is the necessary condition for it to be appreciated and evaluated by the audience and realize its social value.

As for the research on Chinese rock art, Ban Lan and Feng Junsheng put forward four dimensions: social causation, modeling change, symbolic characteristics and modeling elements. (Lan & Junsheng, 2008) Zhu Yuan takes five aspects as the starting point to study the artistic aesthetics of Chinese rock paintings: configuration elements, imaging characteristics, subject connotation, national characteristics and artistic origin. (Yuan, 2013) Emmanuel Anati put forward some views on prehistoric rock paintings from the perspectives of anthropology, sociology and art. Although his elaborations on the themes, paradigms, archetypes and structures of rock paintings were scattered, they could also be regarded as a unique research perspective. (Anati, 2007)

As far as Cangyuan Rock Paintings are concerned, although there is no systematic view at present, some artistic analyses based on the theories and methods of archaeology, anthropology, sociology and later iconography have been scattered in various writings. Wang Ningsheng discusses the technical problems of Cangyuan Rock Paintings from the aspects of color, light and shade, perspective and flat coating, and discusses the style problems of rock paintings from the aspects of exaggeration, proportion, geometric shape, disorder, semi-finished products, bird's eye view and front. Deng Qiyao's research mainly involves the artistic themes of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Other artistic explorations, such as "perspective images, diagrammatic or illusory spatiotemporal relations", "silhouette, frontal law of figures, side law of animals", and "flat and symbolic modeling", belong to the more superficial level.

The five-dimensional artistic framework of Cangyuan Rock Paintings starts from the form of art, integrating knowledge and theories related to form studies, art morphology, art sociology, art stylistics, as well as structuralism and minimalism. This

framework provides an artistic perspective on the essence of rock paintings. The subject matter and images are the material and visual presentation aspects of Cangyuan Rock Paintings, which also constitute their most distinctive visual identity. When combined with appropriate structure, they form the expressive form of the paintings. The theme and style are the choices made based on the particularity of the ideological connotation of Cangyuan Rock Paintings narrative.

The five-dimensional framework covers both the visual surface and internal structure of Cangyuan rock art, encompassing its visual imagery and ideological core. As foundational research, it will provide theoretical support and research paradigms for a comprehensive evaluation of rock art, offering practical theories and methods for the aesthetic appreciation and artistic creation surrounding Cangyuan rock art.

5.2.2.2 Value of Evaluation Dimensions

Artistic aesthetics and evaluation are two concepts that are both related and differentiated. Artistic aesthetics refers to the aspect of feeling, appreciating, evaluating and creating beauty, and mainly emphasizes the aesthetic pleasure brought by the works; art evaluation refers to the rational analysis and criticism of art works, and makes corresponding judgments on the artistic value and significance of the works, and pays attention to the works' forms, contents, techniques and creative backgrounds, and so on. Art evaluation refers to the rational analysis and criticism of a work of art to make corresponding judgments on the artistic value and significance of the work, focusing on the form, content, technique and creative background of the work.

Both aesthetic and evaluation are closely related to the works, and their combination is the value of the five-dimensional structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

From the perspective of aesthetics, the perception, understanding and taste of Cangyuan Rock Paintings cannot be separated from the aesthetic subject's grasp of the rock paintings themselves, including the main idea, theme, thought, emotion and values. As a visual art form, these concepts are embodied through the image form (theme, modeling, structure). The definition and grasp of the aesthetic

dimension of image form is related to people's aesthetic efficiency, and further speaking, it is a matter of the degree of approaching the artistic purpose. The construction of visual forms is an extremely complex task. The choice of materials, tools, and techniques, the formation of shapes and compositions, and the expression of ideas and themes cannot be measured by any specific and uniform standard. This is precisely why there are artistic differences across eras, countries, ethnic groups, and individuals; even for an individual, works can vary greatly in style due to the influence of time, events, and emotions.

From the perspective of evaluation, although the artistic criticism of rock paintings aims at analyzing the artistic characteristics of the works, exploring the deep connotations of the works, and explaining the social significance and value of the works, it is always based on appreciation and starts from the bottom of aesthetics. As a critic, we should not only be close to the work and the appreciator, but also be able to analyze and explain the meaning of the work from a higher dimension, explore a comprehensive, accessible and direct aesthetic path to the heart.

In short, a relatively reasonable standard should include both the review of the content and works of creation, as well as the review of the creative process and all factors related to the creation.

5.3 Recommendations

This paper analyzes the themes, forms, structures, subjects, and styles of the rock paintings in Cangyuan, Yunnan, aiming to explore the aesthetic issues of these rock paintings from their form to content, thereby constructing an artistic dimension for them. During the research process, the author found that certain aspects require more attention. To ensure that the findings of this study can be applied across a broader range of fields, the author offers the following suggestions:

5.3.1 General Recommendations

The five-dimensional artistic structure of Cangyuan Rock Paintings needs to be tested in a broader and deeper scope. Therefore, the study of each dimension should focus on the comparative analysis of rock paintings from different regions and

periods, so as to accurately and deeply grasp the scientificity and accuracy of the analytical dimensions of Cangyuan Rock Paintings.

The study of prehistoric rock paintings is particularly critical to defining their artistic connotations. Due to the different professional backgrounds, perspectives on issues, and personal emotional preferences of researchers, different results will be produced. We should view the research and inheritance of prehistoric rock paintings from the perspective of cultural and artistic heritage protection in light of China's national strategy for the development of contemporary culture and art.

5.3.2 Further Research Recommendations

According to the theory of language type classification of primitive rock paintings by Emmanuel Anati, there are nine “psychological words” around the sacrificial scenes at the first site of Cangyuan Rock Paintings. Although the number is not large, some views are put forward in this paper when analyzing them. But how were these symbols generated? What do they specifically point to? These questions have research value.

The hierarchical paradigm design of the figures in Cangyuan Rock Paintings is not only the most typical sculptural feature but also a key to interpreting the social and artistic themes of these paintings. How to promote and utilize the achievements of Cangyuan Rock Paintings in terms of modeling and design by integrating them with contemporary cultural and artistic markets and modern craftsmanship is worth studying.

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Zhaofu, C. (2009). *The History of the Discovery of Chinese Rock Art*. Shanghai People's Publishing House.





APPENDIX



Figure 22 Reality images of location 1, Zone 2

Source: Photographed by the author in 2024



Figure 23 Reality images of location 2 (The author has enhanced the sharpness of the image)

Source: The image is from literature (Juan, 2016)

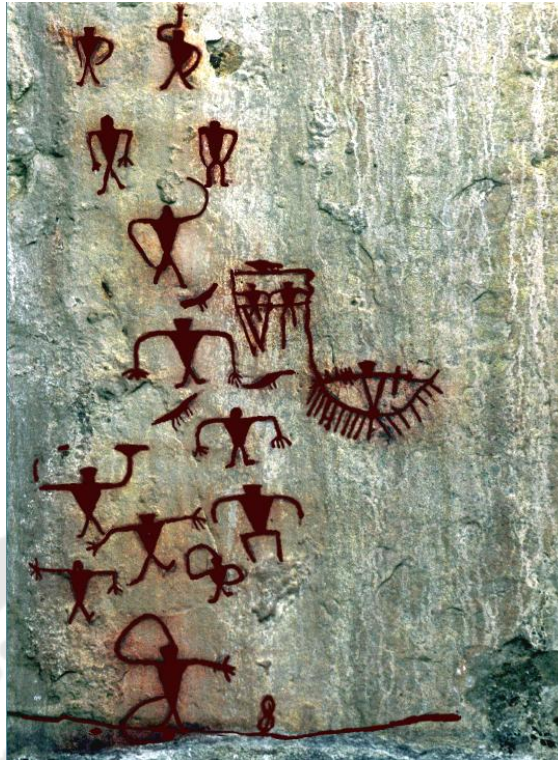


Figure 24 Reality images of location 3

Source: The image is from literature (Qiyao, 2004)



Figure 25 Reality images of location 4

Source: The image is from literature (Juan, 2016)



Figure 26 Reality images of location 5, zone 2 and zone 3

Source: The image is from literature (Juan, 2016)



Figure 27 Reality images of location 6

Source: The image is from literature (Juan, 2016) (Qiyao, 2004) (Art, 2006)



Figure 28 The author compiled and drew the reference literature

Source: The image is from literature (Ningsheng, 1985) (Juan, 2016) (Qiyao, 2004)



Figure 29 Reality images of location 8

Source: The image is from literature (Juan, 2016)



Figure 30 Reality images of location 9

Source: The image is from literature (Juan, 2016)



Figure 31 Reality images of location 10 zone 1 and zone 2

Source: The image is from literature (Juan, 2016)



Figure 32 The author visited the local cultural relics management office and conducted field research on the first site of Cangyuan rock paintings

Source: Photographed by the author in 2024

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