

Feminization Phenomenon of Guanyin: The Gender Transformation of Religious Icon in Song Dynasty

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Abstract: Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, holds an esteemed and irreplaceable position within Mahayana Buddhism. The belief in Guanyin has flourished across various regions of China, becoming deeply entrenched in the religious and cultural fabric of the country. Throughout history, the image of Guanyin has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from a male representation to a revered female deity. This article aims to delve into the period spanning the Han Dynasty to the Song Dynasty, in order to unravel the origins of Guanyin's gender and analyze the profound aesthetic implications associated with the shifts in Guanyin's depiction over time. By scrutinizing the fusion and compromise of the Buddhist notion of equality from its Indian roots and its subsequent integration into Han China, alongside the prevalent Confucian belief in male superiority and female inferiority, the article seeks to illuminate the social and philosophical underpinnings behind the widespread acceptance of the female Guanyin during the Song Dynasty.

Keywords: Guanyin image, feminization, Tang and Song societies, filial piety, respect for mother

1. Introduction

Guanyin is a Bodhisattva deeply rooted in the hearts of the Chinese people. Nowadays, the common depictions of Guanyin in sculptures and paintings often portray her as a female figure. However, the artistic image of Guanyin in ancient India was that of a male figure. After being introduced to China, the transformation from male to female in Guanyin's artistic image was completed from the beginning of the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties to the end of the Song Dynasty. However, the purpose of this article is not to explore the degree of feminization of Guanyin at different stages but to use the feminization of Guanyin as a breakthrough point to explore the prevalence of Buddhist thought in Tang and Song society among various social classes, as well as the expectations and needs of women in Tang and Song society.

The Guanyin was introduced to China from ancient India, and the Sutra on the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma "The Universal Door of the Bodhisattva Who Listens to the Sounds of All the World" translated by Kumarajiva was widely recognized in China, effectively spreading the belief in Guanyin.

Some scriptures believe that Guanyin was originally a male. Such as The Bodhisattva Vyakarana which describes a story that in ancient times, the golden lion traveled to the country of the Tathagata. In that land, there were no women, and the king named Ming Wei De entered samadhi in the garden.

Two lotus flowers appeared on his left and right, giving birth to two sons. The one on the left was named Baoyi, who was Guanyin, while the one on the right was named Treasure Stillness, who was Bodhisattva.” This can be also found in the Flower Adornment Sutra, “In the forest glade by the bank, on the Vajra, sits a courageous and valiant hero, who is also a saint of compassion and endowed with endless wisdom.” Additionally, Beihua Sutra describes There was a holy king with the Wheel-Turning Sage-King’s power, whose name was Amitābha. This king had a thousand sons, and the eldest son’s name was Prince Buxu, who is the same as Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva.

Other Buddhist scriptures believe that Guanyin has no gender distinction. According to “The Universal Door of the Bodhisattva Who Listens to the Sounds of All the World”, Such is the meritorious deeds done by Guanyinn, the Bodhisattva who roams throughout the world and appears in various forms to rescue living beings. “Manjusri Sutra” also considered Guanyin has two kinds of character, “calm virtue” and “wisdom virtue”. The one who is in charge of the virtue of wisdom and daring is called “Vajrapāṇi”, and is shown as a male; the one who is in charge of the virtue of gentleness and quiet is called “krodha”, and is shown as a female. And “A talk on Vimalakirti Sutra” reported that “All phenomena lack inherent identity, neither male nor female. All women likewise possess this quality. Despite appearing as female, they are not inherently female.” These scriptures all mention that Guanyin transcends gender and that the gender and appearance he/she manifests are changeable according to the needs of the devotees, possessing fluidity.

2. Development and Evolution of Guanyin’s Depiction

In ancient India, the shape of Guanyin is similar to that depicted in The Sutra on the contemplation of Amitayus which presents that Guanyin wears a heavenly crown made of pearls on his head, on which stands a transformed Buddha measuring 280,000 meters in height. From this, it can be seen that the heavenly crown is an important characteristic of the Guanyin image. The tall crown naturally bestows a divine and solemn quality on Guanyin’s image. During the Mathura era, the male-looking Guanyin with his right hand in the fearless mudra and left hand holding a lotus flower, sitting in the lotus posture on a lotus pedestal has such a majestic personality trait [1].

According to “the famous paintings of History” written by Yanyuan Zhang, it depicts that Emperor Hanming dreamed of a golden man with a bright crown. He asked his courtiers about it, and some said there was a deity in the West called Buddha, who was 20 meters tall and made of gold. The emperor then sent Cai Yin to bring back a jade statue of Sakyamuni from the country of Tianzhu and ordered craftsmen to make a picture of it on the Qingliang Terrace in the Southern Palace and the Xianjie Tomb. The image was made in an ancient and simple style, and the statue of King Ashoka still can be seen today. It can be inferred that when Buddhism was first introduced to China in the Han Dynasty, the rulers made Buddhist statues in the style of ancient India [2].

The Western Qin statue of the Three Western Saints in Cave 169 of the Bingling Temple is the earliest surviving statue of Guanyin in the Middle Kingdom [3]. This statue of Guanyin is well preserved, with its face and chest painted with white powder, its upper body covered with a slanting armpit, its face rich and rounded, and its clothes folded in layers, similar to the style of the male Guanyin of the Indian Moktura period, but its overall temperament has developed in the direction of roundness and gentleness.

2.1. Northern and Southern Dynasties

After Emperor Xiaowen of Northern Wei moved the capital to Luoyang, the overall style of Buddhist statues became graceful and clear [4]. Therefore, the image of Guanyin also followed the overall trend of the era, towards a slim and graceful image, elegant and otherworldly. For example, in the second niche from the left on the north wall of Guyang Cave, the crossed-legged bodhisattva is depicted with

one hand making the gesture of fearlessness and the other hand supporting the knee. Although the upper body has neutral characteristics, the posture and movement can be felt to be slender.

2.2. Tang Dynasty

According to Zhang Daqian, “The Dunhuang Buddhist paintings of the Northern Wei and Western Wei dynasties often depict Buddhas with a lean and slender appearance, resembling the thin Indians. However, by the time of the Tang dynasty, the depiction of Bodhisattvas in paintings had taken on the features of Chinese people themselves.” From this, it can be inferred that during the Sui and Tang dynasties, the image of Guanyin began to be based on the appearance of human beings. Moreover, in the statues and paintings of Guanyin, the images of male and female Guanyin were mixed, with hundreds of niches in the Mogao Caves alone [2,5]. Therefore, it can be speculated that the Sui and Tang dynasties were a transitional period in which the image of Guanyin transformed from a male image to a female image. In terms of the rounded facial lines and the trend towards feminization, the Tang dynasty six-armed Guanyin with the wish-granting wheel in the Dunhuang Mogao Cave Library is dignified and compassionate in appearance, with a full and rounded figure, and is entirely golden with an elegant and luxurious bearing. It has distinct characteristics of Tang dynasty women. In terms of posture, the standing statue of Guanyin on the south wall of Cave 45 in Dunhuang Mogao Cave, dating from the prosperous Tang dynasty, is richly decorated and luxurious, wearing a pomegranate skirt popular among Tang dynasty women. The overall posture of the body tends towards an “S” shape, with more gentle and feminine upper limbs compared to those of the previous dynasties.

The painting on both sides of the standing statue of Guanyin, depicting Guanyin saving people from various difficulties, and the Thirty-Three Manifestations, shows that in the Tang dynasty, the image of Guanyin began to diversify and become closer to the people [6]. For example, the “Water-Moon Guanyin” in the Thirty-Three Manifestations is said to have been created by the famous court painter Zhou Fang in the late Tang dynasty. The earliest written record of this image can be found in Zhang Yanyang’s “Record of Famous Paintings Through the Dynasties”, which describes it as having “simple clothing, soft and beautiful colors, and a wonderful creation of the body of water and moon” [7]. Although it has not been proven that Water-Moon Guanyin was created by Zhou Fang, it does not negate the fact that Zhou Fang’s painting of Water-Moon Guanyin was highly representative of Guanyin’s painting in the Tang dynasty. In “Record of Famous Paintings of the Tang Dynasty”, it is recorded that Water-Moon Guanyin was very popular among the people at the time and they praised it as the most exquisite and the best of its time [8]. This reflects the popularity of the Guanyin image among the urban middle class and indicates the budding and development of the secularization of the Guanyin image in the Tang dynasty.

2.3. Song Dynasty

As Buddhism became more secularized during the Song Dynasty, the number of Guanyin images with a female appearance increased, and they became more approachable and realistic like the women of the Song Dynasty. For example, the Holding Lotus Guanyin of the Song Dynasty holds a lotus flower in her hand, with her left leg drooping and her feet stepping on rocks, showing a rich sense of life. She is no longer a deity on a high altar but a friendly messenger of the heart, a representative of kindness, and an embodiment of beauty. For example, the Dazu Beishan stone carvings in the Song Dynasty, have numerous Guanyin images. The 125th bead Guanyin has a face like peach blossoms, with beautiful and full eyes, and a diagonal body posture presenting an “S”-shaped female figure. The fluttering clothes highlight her natural beauty, and she has been called the “charming Guanyin” by later generations. Fa Chang’s “White Robe Guanyin” depicts Guanyin meditating by the water’s edge with a simple and elegant image, with concise and gentle lines. The entire picture resembles a

peasant woman sitting quietly by the water, reflecting the Song Dynasty's opposition to idol worship and spiritual enlightenment. This reflects the aesthetic pursuit of emptiness and non-emptiness, existence and non-existence, and freshness beyond the mundane.

In summary, Guanyin Bodhisattva has the characteristic of Dharmakaya without form in Buddhist scriptures, neither male nor female and changes their appearance according to the desires of sentient beings. In the real world, the image of Guanyin Bodhisattva has transformed from male to female, and the style has gradually shifted from the ancient Indian style to one that conforms to Chinese local aesthetics. This is the result of various factors such as society and individuals.

3. An Exploration of the Social Background of the Feminization of the Guanyin Artistic Image in the Song Dynasty

The feminization of the Guanyin sculpture reflects a cultural phenomenon in which women as objects of worship are intertwined with human spiritual life [9]. It is both a part of religious belief and a representation of social gender. As a part of social culture, the construction of the object of worship also expresses the societal construction of gender roles and the expectations of the role of women in Song Dynasty society.

At the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the floating image of the Buddha was placed in the same niche as Laozi, and the seated Buddha statue was covered with a robe, hiding its feet. This is similar to the traditional kneeling posture of the gods and immortals such as the Western Queen Mother and Eastern Duke during the Han Dynasty. Professor Yang Hong believes that if the Buddha statue was depicted in the seated posture with its feet in front of the body, which is commonly seen now, it would have been insulted by the Han people who had not yet fully accepted Buddhism as they would consider it a violation of etiquette. He also believes that to be accepted by the Han people who worshiped the "immortal's good mansion," Ze Rong, a Dan Yang native of the Han Dynasty, transformed the shape of the Buddhist pagoda into the form of a heavy building in traditional Chinese architecture, which resembled steamed buns covered with a bowl [10]. Both changes reflect the Sinicization of Buddhism when it spread to China. With the unification of the Han nationality and the breaking of the domination of the Rongdi, Buddhism broke free from the traditional Chinese ritual constraints, gained significant development, and eventually entered the ranks of important Chinese cultures. Therefore, the transformation of the Guanyin statue from male to female is probably one of the results of the integration of Buddhist and dominant Confucian thought at the time.

4. The Adaptation of the Buddhist Concept of Equality to the Hierarchical Social Views of Ancient India

Early Buddhism proposed the saying "If women become monks, the true teachings will decline by 500 years" and established "attha garu dhamma". These actions have been viewed by later generations as strong evidence of discrimination against women in Buddhism. However, these actions should be comprehensively understood and explored in light of their social context and other influencing factors to determine whether they have caused substantial harm to women. It is possible that these actions were simply moderate compromises and concessions made by Buddhism to adapt to the male-dominated social norms prevalent in ancient India.

Samantapasadika proposes "Initially, the Buddha did not permit women to renounce the world and become ordained. This was to extinguish the true Dharma for five hundred years. Later, the Eight Respectful Guidelines were taught, allowing women to go forth and follow the teachings. By practicing accordingly, they too could attain liberation in a thousand years." The phrase "This was to extinguish the true Dharma for five hundred years" may seem like a negative prediction about women ordaining, but in fact, it was only after the Buddha accepted the requests of his aunt and other women

to ordain that he spoke these words to Ananda. In terms of action, the Buddha did not refuse women's ordination. The Buddha measured the situation from the perspective of human desire. After the establishment of the Bhikkhuni Sangha, as contact with the Bhikkhu Sangha increased, there could be negative effects. Thus, the Buddha proposed "the Eight Garudhammas" as a precautionary measure, likening it to preventing leaks in a well-constructed dam. The true purpose of "the Eight Garudhammas" was to promote reverence and humility among the Bhikkhunis, so that they would not blindly request teachings from Bhikkhus who were not qualified to provide them. Bhikkhus should also reflect on their qualifications before instructing Bhikkhunis [11].

In ancient Indian society, privileges were granted to high-caste men, while all rights of women were stripped away. The exploitation of women reached its peak in the Manusmriti, a legal treatise based on Vedic scripture and traditional customs compiled by Brahmin priests. The treatise stated that "a virtuous woman should always revere her husband as if he were a god, even if he has bad habits, behaves immorally, or has no redeeming qualities." It also prohibited women from conducting individual rituals, making vows, observing fasts, or practicing celibacy. Only by serving her husband could a woman earn respect in heaven [12]. It is clear that during ancient India, women could not attain the ultimate enlightenment without being attached to their husbands. Therefore, the act of allowing women to ordain in Buddhism itself affirmed the value of women. The rule women should be under the control of their male partners day and night, and women who are attached to sensual pleasures should be directly regulated by their husbands illustrated that in ancient India, women were considered subordinate to men and had distinct "object-like" characteristics. They existed under the "private law" established by their husbands and did not enjoy independent personality and autonomy. In comparison, while the Eight Garudhammas was established to regulate the behavior of Bhikkhunis, in practical terms, they effectively reduced the likelihood of accidents during their practice and had a protective purpose. The Eight Garudhammas were a uniform regulation for the practice of Bhikkhunis, which differed from the viewpoint of ancient Indian society that viewed women as subordinate objects. The regulation was designed to promote the character and conduct of Bhikkhunis as independent individuals and to help Buddhism continue to develop.

Therefore, although early Buddhism had many texts that regulated women, these were necessary compromises made by Buddhism to adapt to the oppressive social environment at the time. Otherwise, it would have been difficult for Buddhism to survive.

5. The Adaptation of the Buddhist Concept of Equality to the Hierarchical Social Views of Ancient India

The founder of Buddhism, Shakyamuni, pointed out that all sentient beings have Buddha's nature and are equal. Both men and women are sentient beings, and the only difference is in their appearance, not in their beliefs or morality. As the Nirvana Sutra says, "Those who cannot recognize Buddha-nature are referred to as women. Those who can recognize Buddha nature are called men." If a woman recognizes that she has a Buddha nature, she is equivalent to a man [13]. This viewpoint is consistent with the attitude of many women who, in the face of oppression by a male-dominated society, hoped for change. Therefore, after being introduced to China, many women chose to believe in Buddhism which subsequently had a certain impact on the behavioral norms of ancient women based on Confucian ethics and morality. In the Zixia Biography, it is said that "Women have three obediences: to follow their father before marriage, to follow their husband after marriage, and to follow their son after their husband's death." This indicates that under the rule of traditional Confucian feudalism, patriarchalism, and family hierarchy, women were confined to their homes for their entire lives, lost education opportunities, and could only "enjoy" the social value bestowed upon them by their families. Essentially, this was a form of female dependence on men.

For women to move from being accessories to independent individuals, it is possible that the focus of external attention shifted from their roles as mothers and wives to their character and behavior. As Buddhist thought spread and actively absorbed traditional Confucian cultural ethics and norms during the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern dynasties, it sought to avoid conflict with local religious sects. Consequently, it, along with Confucian culture, reconstructed a set of evaluation standards for women. For example, in the Northern Wei's "Tomb Inscription of Princess Jiangyang," it is said that she had "innate beauty and grace, intelligence, and had studied in the nine disciplines, thus there was no limit to her knowledge. She excelled in poetry and calligraphy and was able to write about everything she saw. She was also devoted to Buddhism, which allowed her to explore all aspects of culture." The inscription emphasizes Jiangyang's extensive education, covering content from all levels of society, and her acceptance of Buddhist thought, combining the teachings of both Confucianism and Buddhism. In the "Tomb Inscription of Gao Meng's Wife, Yuan Ying," it is said that "She was interested in reading history and art, and was a tireless learner. She could understand the deep meaning of the seven classics and spread Buddhist teachings on the streets. She also spread spiritual enlightenment through her devotion to Buddhism". "Reading history and art" is a Confucian allusion, meaning that she studied books and paintings, while "spreading Buddhist teachings on the streets" and "spiritual enlightenment" is typical Buddhist expressions, indicating that Yuan Ying, like Jiangyang, was proficient in both Confucianism and Buddhism. From this, it can be seen that society began to place greater emphasis on women's knowledge and cultivation in Buddhist studies, placing it on par with the virtues advocated by Confucianism, and highlighting and praising it as a form of identity capital [14].

The impact of Buddhist ideology on women's lives has also been reflected in the funeral customs and traditions of Confucian culture. Confucianism follows the rites of the Zhou Dynasty, which emphasizes joint burial for husbands and wives. Therefore, Du's family requested Jiwuzi to permit them to move the remains of their ancestor and relocate the tomb to another place. Jiwuzi agreed to their request. However, when they entered Jiwuzi's new residence, they did not dare to cry according to the proper mourning etiquette. Jiwuzi said, 'Joint burials were not a custom in ancient times, but they have been practiced since the time of Duke Zhou and have not been changed until now. The importance of joint burial emphasized by Confucianism and its high social acceptance still reflects the traditional Confucian idea of "following the husband." However, during the Tang Dynasty, the most frequently mentioned content in the last words of women who believed in Buddhism was not to be buried with their husbands (16 cases in total). The epitaphs of the wives of Tang Dynasty officials show that they had their pursuit of the Pure Land in Buddhism, and therefore chose not to be buried together. All of them were executed by their sons. (See Table Cases 1-16 in "Leaving the Form to Know, No Tiredness of Things: The World of Sui and Tang Women in the Last Words") [15]. The fact that the sons respected their mother's decision and executed it reflects the Confucian idea of filial piety and is a manifestation of equal rights for women brought about by Buddhist ideology, which utilizes Confucianism and Buddhism's shared idea of respecting mothers to challenge the traditional Confucian culture of male superiority and female inferiority. Therefore, it can be seen that before the Song Dynasty, women who were influenced by Buddhist ideology had already constructed a unique spiritual world, deciding to change the traditional custom of joint burial and choosing the path to the Pure Land.

6. The Commonality of Thought Between Buddhism and Confucianism: The Concept of Filial Piety

Confucianism emphasizes the importance of "filial piety" which is an important concept in Confucian culture. The Analects of Confucius, Chapter One: Learning records, Filial piety, and fraternal respect are the fundamental nature of human beings. The Classic on Filial Piety, Chapter Three: The

Source of Filial Piety also emphasizes that This is the rule of heaven, the principle of earth, the conduct of the people, and the basis of virtue. Many Buddhist texts discuss the relationship between filial piety and family. The Buddhist monk Qisong, a prominent figure in the Northern Song Dynasty, wrote in his “Essay on Filial Piety” that filial piety is the first of the great precepts. In the Sutra of the Great Loving-Kindness and Compassion of the Bhikshuni, it shows that Buddhism to a certain extent recognizes the great merit of motherhood, making the integration of “respecting mothers” between Confucianism and Buddhism more rational and laying a solid foundation for the future development of integration and the feminization of Guanyin Bodhisattva.

Confucianism emphasizes “benevolence and filial piety”, while the core spirit of Buddhism is “compassion”. Both of them emphasize a state of cultivation of life. This is an important condition for their mutual influence. As mentioned earlier, although the idea of gender equality in Buddhism has had some impact on the Confucian belief in male superiority and female inferiority, the Confucian concept of “men and women should not touch” is still deeply ingrained in people’s minds. As the embodiment of compassion and representative work, Guanyin Bodhisattva transformed from male to female, overcoming the dilemma of being able to only save men but not women. In addition, Guanyin Bodhisattva’s transformation from male to female also relied on the Confucian concept of respecting mothers, to ensure that men could believe in Guanyin without psychological burden. The respect for the mother in Confucian ethical society is based on the responsibilities assigned to women by society, such as bearing and raising children and managing household chores, which are attached to male power and beneficial for offspring, rather than the maintenance of women’s status. Fundamentally, mothers still rely on fathers. Moreover, the requirements of Confucianism for mothers are loving, submissive, selfless, tolerant, and easy to approach, which may be a constraint on women. However, this coincides with the spirit of compassion in Buddhist thought. Therefore, in the process of secularization, Buddhism chose to feminize Guanyin, using this commonality to save and transform women, while letting men let go of their “mental burden”, thus achieving the goal of saving all beings, embodying the inclusive thinking of Mahayana Buddhism, and also demonstrating the pursuit of gender equality in Buddhism. However, the gender transformation, in this case, is only a manifestation of its secularization, and it is not really that Guanyin Bodhisattva has changed from male to female. Guanyin Bodhisattva itself has no gender distinction and only undergoes form transformation as needed.

7. Changes in Social Needs During the Song Dynasty

7.1. Men’s Appeal to Emotional Dependence

During the Song Dynasty, China was still in a state of turmoil and instability, especially during the transition from the Northern Song to the Southern Song and the Jingkang Incident [16]. Although the male Guanyin, Master Dingde, brought victory in the war and the hope of peace to the people, they still yearned for emotional comfort and a sense of belonging. Confucianism was still the mainstream ideology at the time, with its first chapter of The Commentary on the Book of Changes, Introduction stating, “The heavens are high above, and the earth is low below; the universe is fixed and stable. The way of the heavens is male, and the way of the earth is female.” In addition, Confucius mentioned in “The Analects of Confucius, Chapter Eight: Tai Bo” that “Emperor Shun had five faithful ministers and the world was peaceful; King Wu said, “I have ten wicked ministers.” Confucius replied, “It is difficult to find talented people, isn’t it? But during the reigns of the emperors Yao and Shun, the world was at its best, and they had only nine women between them.” It was at its height during the Tang and Yu dynasties, when there were only nine women, and in “The Analects of Confucius, Chapter Nine: Yang Huo”, it was mentioned that “It is difficult to raise only women and small-minded people.” These ideas reflected the male-dominated ideology and the idea that women were

subordinate to men and that men could not confide in their wives and concubines. However, both men and women can perceive the outside world and their emotions need to be released. The core of women's worship at the time was the worship of their mothers. Although the idea of women's worship was lost in the male-dominated social concept, the idea of filial piety towards mothers still existed [17]. The concept of filial piety provided men with a place to express their emotions. Guanyin then acquired the attribute of "motherhood" and provided a sense of subconscious belonging, leading to the transformation of Guanyin's image from a masculine deity to a female bodhisattva. In other words, people at the time worshipped Guanyin and depicted her as a female figure. In addition to her compassionate and benevolent nature, Guanyin's image also relied on the maternal instincts that had evolved over thousands of years.

The virtuous female personality ideal of Confucianism included "ritual," "filial piety," "virtue," "righteousness," and "chastity," which meant self-regulation, respecting others, filial piety, kindness, doing good deeds, understanding the great truths, and being faithful until death. Under the influence of the trend of the integration of the three religions in the Song Dynasty, a cultural pattern emerged in which Confucianism was the main ideology, and Buddhism and Taoism were secondary, with a closer connection between Buddhist and Confucianism thinking. Therefore, the Confucianism view of women naturally combined with the compassion displayed by Guanyin, who was a bodhisattva in Buddhism that saved the suffering and could be liberated as long as one called out her name with a pure heart. Thus, Guanyin appeared in the form of a female figure, displaying the compassion of Buddhism in rescuing all sentient beings.

7.2. The Legend of Princess Myojin Emerged and Flourished

Princess Miaoshan has been rumored to be the prototype for Guanyin Bodhisattva. The earliest record of this can be found in Zhu Bian's "Qu Wei Jiu Wen" during the Southern Song Dynasty [18]. It states, "Refined and polished, it is recorded in a biography that in the past there was a King Zhuang of an unknown state, who had three daughters. The youngest was named Miaoshan, who used her hands and eyes to cure her father." By the end of the Song Dynasty and the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty, Guan Daosheng further explained and improved upon this story in his "Brief Biography of Guanyin Bodhisattva." He wrote, "Guanyin was born in a Western country named Miaozihuang, and she was the third daughter of King Miaozihuang. When King Miaozihuang wanted to find a husband for her, she refused and was thus banished from the palace. Later, when King Miaozihuang became seriously ill, Guanyin forgot about her past grievances and used her own hands and eyes to cure her father's illness. The king was deeply moved and prayed to the heavens and the earth, asking for his daughter's forgiveness. Soon after, many immortals with miraculous powers came to pay their respects to her." Subsequently, various Chinese stories of Guanyin have been circulated, such as "personal salvation and filial piety: two precious scroll narratives of Guanyin and her acolytes" "The Complete Biography of Guanyin in the South Sea," and "Guanyin's Enlightenment," which are all based on this original story [19].

The emergence of the legend of Princess Miaoshan is closely related to the historical trend of the integration of the three major religions in the Song dynasty. As suggested by Jiyu Ren in his article "From Buddhism to Confucianism: Changes in Tang-Song Thought Trends," the cultural structure of more than a thousand years in China has been closely related to the three major religions of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. The changes in doctrines and teachings from Buddhism to Confucianism appeared to be different, but in fact, they were discussing related issues."

In the early Northern Song dynasty, Emperor Taizu of Song believed that "The golden mean of the Book of Rites, the natural principle of Taoism, and the doctrine of the inaction of Buddhism are all the same in essence." Monk Zhiyuan was a Buddhist who called himself "the Master of the Mean." He believed that although the teachings of Confucianism and Buddhism had different expressions,

the underlying principles were the same. He advocated “cultivating oneself through Confucianism and managing the mind through Buddhism,” proposing that “the Buddhist and Confucian doctrines have the same essence, and sticking to one’s ideas would be obstructive while forgetting one’s Ideological bondage would be enlightening.” These ideas vividly embodied the concept of integrating the three major religions. In addition, Qi Song was also an important advocate of the integration of the three religions in the Northern Song dynasty. The most characteristic aspect of his thought was his emphasis on filial piety, which he described in his work “On Filial Piety” by stating that “filial piety is respected by all religions, and particularly by Buddhism.” At the same time, he was also troubled by the fact that the essence of his ideas was not well publicized, and thus people were unable to understand them. It is possible that the trend of the integration of the three major religions in the Song dynasty facilitated the spread of Buddhist thought in a society dominated by Confucianism, and the legend of Princess Miaoshan emerged under the influence of this historical trend.

Yu Junfang mentioned that the appearance of the legend of Princess Miaoshan is a typical example of mythologizing history, where the Chinese people transformed the transcendent Guanyin Bodhisattva into a historical figure through various myths and legends, which is in line with the process of deification of Chinese gods, where mortal beings become deified after death. The book also suggests that the legend of Princess Miaoshan may have originated from the story of King Wonderful Adornment in the Lotus Sutra, where he was influenced by his two sons and converted to Buddhism. One of his sons was reborn as the Medicine King Bodhisattva, who offered his arm as a sacrifice and enshrined it in a Buddhist pagoda. Based on social status and aspirations, Yu Junfang believes that the lifestyle of the White Lotus Sect believers is very similar to that of Princess Miaoshan, and therefore infers that Princess Miaoshan may have been a householder [20]. Tian Hai in his book “White Lotus Society in Chinese History” believes that the activities of Mao Ziyuan in the early Southern Song Dynasty marked the beginning of the White Lotus movement. The postscript of the Qisha Yanshengjing in 1232 indicated that the White Lotus movement was flourishing in the Wujiang and Huating areas of the late Southern Song Dynasty. In the lives of these lay practitioners, the belief in Guanyin was a prominent feature. They built temples, pagodas, and printed sutras to promote the faith in Guanyin. Therefore, he deduces that lay practitioners found similarities between Princess Miaoshan and their way of life, so they incorporated the legend into their sect, making female believers more active and promoting the spread of a feminine Guanyin. Moreover, the White Lotus movement received support from various social classes from the Song to the Yuan Dynasty. Even Yu Junfang believes that the name “Miaoshan” was already a popular auspicious name for female believers before the birth of the Miaoshan legend. Therefore, the author of the story chose this familiar auspicious name to gain a wider audience.

7.3. The Emergence of a New Class of Citizens

During the Tang dynasty, Buddhist statues shifted from simply representing reverence and devotion to becoming a product of the interpenetration of religious and secular, with distinctly feminine characteristics [21]. In the early Tang dynasty, the renowned monk Daoxuan said, “Today, people call palace maids bodhisattvas.” When discussing the flourishing of Buddhist statues in the Tang dynasty, Liang Sicheng said, “The style and subject matter of the statues are quite different from those of earlier periods. Daily life had already gradually infiltrated into religious ideas, and thus art, which was previously completely driven by religion, became more closely connected to secular life [21].” In the essay “A Study on the Painting Techniques of the Korean Goryeo Water Moon Guanyin Image: China’s Influence and Differences,” Lee hyun joo points out that the Guanyin statues of the Tang dynasty possess spiritual qualities that resemble real people, with artists imbuing kindness into the divine. The postures of the statues also evolved from being single to being diverse, and in terms of artistic style, the Guanyin statues underwent a transformation from being simple and unadorned to

being elaborate and refined. And the aesthetic changes in Guanyin sculptures in the Song Dynasty can be summarized as an emphasis on divinity and an increase in commonality [6, 22]. Guanyin moved away from the divine and coquettish, becoming a true portrayal of working women at that time. Due to the economic and cultural prosperity and the development of industry and commerce during the peak of the Song Dynasty, entertainment venues such as teahouses and theaters were popular in cities. Emerging urbanites with independent economic status naturally had spiritual pursuits and creativity. Their interests reflected the joys and sorrows of real life, so a humanized aesthetic sense was reflected in religious art [23].

Naito Konan's concept of "Tang-Song Transformation" effectively explains the reasons for aesthetic changes from the perspective of social change. He believes that "there are significant differences in the cultural nature between the Tang and Song dynasties: the Tang Dynasty marks the end of the medieval period, while the Song Dynasty marks the beginning of the modern period, including the transitional period from the late Tang Dynasty to the Five Dynasties." During the Tang-Song period, the nobility lost their power, and the position of the monarch became closer to the people. Anyone who wanted to hold a high position could not rely on hereditary status but needed to be appointed by the emperor. In other words, it was a transition from a noble society to a commoner society. The Aristocratic-style literature, music, and art also transformed into commoner-style literature, music, and art [24]. According to "A Study on the Painting Techniques of the Korean Goryeo Water Moon Guanyin Image: China's Influence and Differences," during the Tang-Song transitional period, there was also a change in the image and expression of Guanyin. The painting of the Water and Moon Guanyin was no longer just a tool for expressing religious rituals but rather developed towards the representation of emptiness and the enjoyment of art. Therefore, the secularization and feminization of Guanyin are closely related to the social changes during the Tang-Song period. For example, the Water and Moon Guanyin mentioned earlier, began to represent the aesthetic preferences and needs of ordinary people. In the Thousand Buddha Caves of Dunhuang, the annotation below the Water and Moon Guanyin painting reads, "called the 'difficult moon' for new brides and young wives..." indicating that the painting was made by a mother-in-law to pray for her daughter-in-law's safe delivery [6]. This explains the reason why Guanyin sculptures in Tang-Song society became completely secularized and feminized, which is due to the change in societal aesthetic preferences, as those who hold the power to determine societal aesthetic preferences changed.

8. Conclusion

In summary, the transformation of low-status women in India and China into goddess figures during the Tang and Song dynasties was mainly due to the Sinicization and secularization of Buddhism, which allowed it to adapt to the local Chinese social sects. Under the influence of the Three Religions Unification Movement in the Song Dynasty, Buddhism further integrated with Chinese indigenous thoughts, achieving the mutual docking of Confucianism and the Buddhist view of women. Buddhism propagated its concept of gender equality to society through the shared concept of respect for motherhood with Confucianism. The frequent wars at the turn of the two Song dynasties were also an important factor in the Sinicization of Buddhism. The long-standing psychological needs of the people and the maternal complex that gradually formed during human evolution made society in need of a female compassionate figure for comfort. In response to such needs, Buddhism gradually completed its Sinicization, and Guanyin Bodhisattva transformed from a powerful masculine figure to a Sinicized motherly and feminine Bodhisattva.

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