

# Cultural Adaptation of Spatial Atmosphere and Traffic Narrative Expression in the Feixian Pavilion Cliff Carvings of Pujiang: A Study on the Southwest Silk Road

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**Abstract:** The Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings in Pujiang stand as a significant cultural heritage site along the Southern Silk Road. Their spatial creation not only embodies profound religious implications but also responds to the behavioral patterns, psychological expectations, and spiritual demands of travelers within the historical transportation context. As an important cultural landscape formed through the interaction between human mobility and natural terrain, the site reflects how religious imagery and spatial organization were integrated into the lived experience of travel along the ancient route. Breaking away from the relatively static analytical paradigms of traditional iconography and stylistic studies, this research introduces a dual interpretive framework that combines the perspectives of “spatial atmosphere” (Yi Jing) and “traffic narrative.” Through this approach, the study systematically explores the cultural adaptation mechanisms through which Feixian Pavilion responded to its particular geographical setting and historical travel environment. The research first analyzes the spatial pattern of the carving cluster, demonstrating how the carvings rely on the surrounding natural landscape while aligning closely with the dynamics of the ancient mountain paths. By following the trajectory of the historical route, the carvings gradually unfold along the traveler’s line of sight, forming a sequential visual experience that guides movement and perception. In this way, the site constructs a sacred realm experienced in motion, enriched through layered visual guidance and multi-sensory spatial perception. Furthermore, the study reveals how the core narrative themes of the Southwest Silk Road—such as pilgrimage, protection during travel, and cultural exchange—are materially projected onto carving subjects, spatial sequences, and inscribed texts. These elements together demonstrate the deep and mutually constructive relationship between the “road” and the “images.” Building on this foundation, the paper further analyzes the cultural adaptability between spatial atmosphere and traffic narrative across three key dimensions: the coupling of morphological layout and narrative flow, the correspondence between site function and narrative content, and the resonance between atmospheric ambiance and narrative themes. The study ultimately indicates that Feixian Pavilion achieved an organic unity between religious sanctity and travel practicality by conforming to the rhythm of movement along the ancient route, embedding functions for rest and prayer, and creating a transcendent spiritual atmosphere within the natural landscape. Consequently, it functioned as an important cultural node within the linear transportation network, helping maintain spiritual order and reinforcing cultural identity along the Southern Silk Road.

**Keywords:** Pujiang Feixian Pavilion, Southwest Silk Road; Spatial Atmosphere (Yi Jing), Traffic Narrative, Cultural Adaptation, Linear Cultural Heritage

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background and Problem Statement

The Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings in Pujiang represent a crucial remnant of Buddhist art from the Tang and Song dynasties in southwestern China. Their formation is intrinsically linked to the development of the Silk Road transportation network. Scholars have pointed out that the Silk Road was not merely a channel for trade but also a vital pathway for religious dissemination and cultural exchange, exerting a profound influence on the formation

of religious art along its route<sup>[1]</sup>. Furthermore, research indicates that sites along the Silk Road often possessed multiple attributes simultaneously—religious, commercial, and transportation nodes—serving historically as important venues for spiritual solace and cultural identity<sup>[2]</sup>.

This cluster of carvings, carved into the mountainside following the natural terrain and overlooking the river, reflects a deep interaction between ancient transportation paths and humanistic landscapes in its site selection and layout. Through the long-term integration of Silk Road commerce and cultural propagation, Feixian Pavilion gradually evolved into a spatial atmosphere that blends religious belief, geographical environment, and travel experience, becoming a significant carrier of spiritual comfort and cultural identity on the Silk Road.

However, existing research has predominantly focused on case studies of carving subjects or artistic styles, lacking a systematic exploration of how the spatial creation responds to and adapts to the cultural demands within the context of Silk Road traffic. Particularly in the dynamic process of cross-regional cultural exchange, how the carving cluster achieves a balance between religious sanctity and travel functionality through the synergistic construction of visual symbols, spatial sequences, and the natural environment remains to be thoroughly elucidated. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze from the dual perspectives of spatial atmosphere generation and traffic narrative expression to reveal the adaptation mechanisms of the Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings within their specific geographical and cultural contexts. This approach seeks to further understand the deep interactive logic among people, space, and faith in ancient linear cultural heritage.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to deeply explore the unique spatial atmosphere formed by the Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings in Pujiang within the traffic context of the Southwest Silk Road, as well as the internal mechanisms of their cultural adaptation with travel narratives. By analyzing the synergistic relationships between the spatial layout of the carving cluster, visual sequences, and the natural environment, this research reveals how the site leverages the interaction of mountain bodies, waterways, and paths to construct a humanistic field that possesses both religious sanctity and travel functionality.

Further focusing on the perceptual experiences of mobile groups such as ancient merchants and monks, the study analyzes the functions undertaken by carving art on long transportation routes, including spiritual solace, cultural marking, and identity recognition. It seeks to interpret the narrative strategies employed to achieve meaning transmission in cross-regional cultural exchanges. The research strives to break through the traditional analysis paradigms dominated by stylistics or iconography, viewing space instead as a dynamic carrier of cultural practice. It examines the adaptive expression of religious art under specific geographical and social conditions, aiming to provide a fresh perspective on how static religious monuments functioned within fluid historical movements.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

#### **1.3.1 Theoretical Significance**

On a theoretical level, this study attempts to transcend the paradigm of traditional cliff carving research, which is often limited to static iconography and archaeological dating. By introducing traffic narrative theory into the spatial interpretation of linear cultural heritage, it constructs an analytical framework of "Road-Image" mutual construction. This approach deeply reveals the generative logic of spatial atmosphere within a fluid context, enriching academic discussions on the interaction mechanisms of human-land relationships in dynamic transportation networks. It provides a new perspective for understanding how ancient spatial practices responded to complex social functions, bridging the gap between architectural geography and religious art history.

#### **1.3.2 Practical Significance**

In terms of practical application, the research findings can provide a scientific basis for the protection and utilization of Feixian Pavilion in Pujiang and similar Southwest Silk Road sites. By decoding behavioral patterns and perceptual experiences in historical scenarios, the study guides contemporary exhibition planning to more accurately restore the "spirit of place," thereby avoiding homogenized development. Optimizing the organizational strategies for recreational routes and narrative nodes helps enhance the interpretive depth and experience quality of cultural heritage. This promotes the creative transformation of traditional spatial wisdom in the context of cultural and tourism integration, realizing a benign symbiosis between heritage conservation and regional development.

### **1.4 Review of Domestic and International Research**

Current academic research on cliff carvings primarily concentrates on archaeological dating, the evolution of artistic styles, and interpretations of religious iconography. When studying Chinese Buddhist carvings and grotto art, foreign scholars often adopt a perspective that combines religious practice with art history. They argue that grotto carvings are not merely religious artworks but also important spatial carriers for religious rituals and faith practices<sup>[3]</sup>. Additionally, in studies regarding the development of early Chinese Buddhist architecture and grotto temples, scholars have pointed out that the Northern Dynasties were a critical stage for the rapid development of Buddhist art and architecture, with their spatial forms closely related to the spread of Buddhism<sup>[4]</sup>.

Domestic scholars have mostly approached the subject from the perspectives of art history and iconography, systematically organizing the subjects, stylistic evolution, and their relationship with the spread of Buddhism in Chinese grottoes and cliff carvings. This has provided an important foundation for understanding the development of Chinese Buddhist art. In comparison, research specifically targeting Feixian Pavilion has mainly focused on its historical value and artistic characteristics as a node on the Southwest Silk Road.

While existing achievements have confirmed the hub status of this site in cultural exchange, viewing it from a broader historical perspective reveals that the Silk Road is regarded as a major cultural exchange channel connecting Eurasia. The dissemination and fusion of different religious arts and material cultures within the transportation network have profoundly influenced the cultural forms and spatial patterns of sites along the route<sup>[5]</sup>. However, most studies proceed from a static artifact perspective, paying less attention to the dynamic correlation between spatial forms and traffic flow lines.

Regarding the creation of spatial atmosphere, existing literature tends to focus on the artistic analysis of single niches, lacking systematic research that places the carving cluster within a linear transportation network to examine how it guides the psychological experiences of travelers through spatial sequences. Furthermore,

theoretical discussions on traffic narrative expression are often confined to textual verification or macro-historical narratives, failing to delve into the micro-levels of spatial perception and behavioral interaction. This results in an insufficient understanding of the deep cultural adaptation mechanisms between the "road" and the "images." Although some interdisciplinary attempts have begun to introduce landscape narrative theory, the comprehensive coupling analysis of natural terrain, artificial structures, and the behavioral patterns of mobile populations remains relatively weak in specific cases. This study attempts to break through the limitations of a single disciplinary perspective based on a review of existing academic contexts, exploring the mutual construction relationship between spatial atmosphere and traffic narrative within specific geographical and cultural contexts, hoping to provide a new interpretive dimension for understanding the overall value of linear cultural heritage.

### **1.5 Scope of Research**

This study focuses on the Feixian Pavilion cliff carving cluster in Pujiang and its surrounding natural and humanistic environment. The temporal scope is primarily the Tang and Song dynasties, while the spatial scope covers the carving entities, mountain terrain, remnants of ancient paths, and the riverside visual domain. The research emphasizes examining its nodal role within the transportation network of the Southwest Silk Road.

Adopting interdisciplinary methods, the study combines field surveys and spatial mapping to obtain first-hand data on carving layouts, visual corridors, and path relationships. Through literature review and image analysis, it reconstructs historical traffic scenarios and religious practice backgrounds. Introducing space syntax and perception theory, the research analyzes the spatial organization logic of the carving sequences and the moving experiences of viewers. The research framework first clarifies the geographical location and traffic attributes of Feixian Pavilion, then analyzes the constituent elements and generative mechanisms of its spatial atmosphere. Subsequently, it explores how carving narratives align with travel activities, finally interpreting its adaptive expression patterns in a cross-cultural context, forming a progressive analysis path from material form to cultural meaning.

## **2. Literature Review**

As a significant Buddhist cultural relic along the Southwest Silk Road, the research on Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings involves multiple academic fields, including religious art history, transportation geography, cultural exchange, and spatial experience. With the deepening of Silk Road studies, the academic community has gradually recognized that religious relics along the route are not only material carriers of art and faith but also cultural landscapes formed by the interweaving of transportation networks and social activities. Therefore, examining cliff carvings from the perspectives of cross-regional exchange and spatial narrative has become an important direction in recent related research.

Research on cultural dissemination along the Silk Road provides a macro-framework for understanding the historical background of cliff carvings. Hansen (2012) pointed out that the Silk Road was not only a channel for material trade but also an important medium for the dissemination of religious thoughts and art forms, with cultural interactions often manifested in transportation nodes and settlements along the way. Whitfield (2015), through research on social life along the Silk Road, further indicated that mobile and settled groups, such as monks, merchants, and local residents, jointly participated in the process of cultural exchange, causing religious art to undergo continuous localization transformations during its dissemination. Liu (2010), from a world history perspective, emphasized that the Silk Road formed a complex cultural network in the process of connecting different civilization systems, wherein religious relics often became important material witnesses of cross-cultural exchange. Regarding research on the transportation system in the southwest region, Kan et al.

(2025), through a comprehensive analysis of historical documents and geographical information, reconstructed the historical routes of the Southern Silk Road in the Sichuan section. They pointed out that mountainous transportation often unfolded along river valleys and canyons, a geographical condition that largely influenced the spatial distribution patterns of religious relics. Elias (2024), in discussing artistic exchange on the Southwest Silk Road, also noted that Buddhist art exhibited obvious cross-regional dissemination characteristics within this transportation network, forming expressions with local characteristics in different local cultural environments.

In the field of Buddhist grottoes and cliff carving research, scholars have gradually paid attention to the relationship between spatial layout and modes of viewing. Yang (2024), through research on Buddhist cliff carvings in northern Sichuan, pointed out that such carvings often adhered to mountain bodies or riverbanks and were distributed linearly along transportation paths, thereby forming continuous visual nodes during travel. This type of spatial organization allowed religious images to integrate into travel experiences and gradually unfold narratives during dynamic viewing. Wang and Yan (2023), in their spatial composition analysis of Mogao Cave 254 in Dunhuang, indicated that the spatial design of Buddhist grottoes was not merely a visual display. Instead, through arrangements of scale, hierarchy, and circulation, it guided viewers to complete a gradually unfolding narrative experience during movement. Chi (2023), in exploring the impact of Silk Road cultural exchange on the development of large stone carvings, pointed out that the selection of subjects, scale, and spatial layout of carvings were often closely related to local traffic conditions and social needs. Their artistic forms reflected not only religious beliefs but also regional adaptability under the background of cultural exchange.

Beyond art and spatial forms, the social behaviors and cultural practices carried by cliff carvings have also received academic attention. Birnbaum (2017), through a systematic review of Buddhist cliff inscriptions, pointed out that inscription contents often recorded behaviors such as donating funds for carvings and praying for blessings, reflecting the participation of monks, officials, and merchant groups in religious practices. These textual materials not only possess religious significance but also provide important historical data for studying ancient social activities. Zhou (2025), in researching the Nanshan and Beishan carving clusters in Dazu District, pointed out that the spaces where cliff carvings are located often become important venues for local social activities. Beyond religious rituals, they also undertake functions of social interaction and public memory. Wenzel (2019), from the perspective of steles and text dissemination, pointed out that the act of stone carving allows personal faith experiences to be preserved for a long time and continuously read and re-interpreted by new viewers through display in public spaces.

In terms of spatial experience and landscape narrative theory, human geography and architectural theory have provided important methods for related research. Tuan (1977) proposed the "Space-Place" theory, believing that humans endow space with meaning through perception, memory, and emotion, transforming it into a place with cultural value. Norberg-Schulz (1980), in his theory of "Genius Loci," further pointed out that the relationship between architecture and the natural environment can shape a unique spatial atmosphere, making people feel a sense of belonging and identity. The concept of "Landscape Narratives" proposed by Potteiger and Purinton (1998) emphasizes that space can construct narrative structures through paths, nodes, and visual elements, guiding viewers to form continuous experiences during movement. In recent years, multi-sensory landscape research has gradually gained attention. Multisensory Landscapes (2023) pointed out that factors such as sound, light and shadow, and climatic environments also participate in the construction of spatial experience, thereby presenting more complex perceptual dimensions in landscape narratives.

In summary, domestic and international scholars have conducted in-depth research on cliff carvings from multiple aspects, including Silk Road cultural exchange, Buddhist grotto art, social behavior practices, and spatial experience theory. Foreign research focuses more on macro cultural exchange and the discussion of

theoretical methods, such as theories of spatial experience, genius loci, and landscape narratives, providing important perspectives for understanding the cultural significance of historical landscapes. Domestic research, on the other hand, has conducted extensive empirical studies on specific sites, artistic styles, and historical backgrounds, systematically organizing the subjects, era characteristics, and social functions of cliff carvings.

However, certain deficiencies still exist in current research. On one hand, research on cliff carvings mostly concentrates on the perspectives of art history or religious history, paying relatively less attention to their spatial narrative functions within transportation networks. On the other hand, although some studies have noticed the relationship between carvings and traffic paths, there is still a lack of systematic analysis of the interaction mechanisms among spatial atmosphere, behavioral experience, and narrative structures. Especially in the complex mountainous transportation environment of the Southwest Silk Road, how cliff carvings influence the psychological experiences of travelers through spatial layout, visual focal points, and environmental atmosphere requires further exploration.

Based on this, this paper takes the Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings as the research object. Against the background of Silk Road traffic, starting from the perspectives of spatial atmosphere and traffic narrative, and combining multi-dimensional factors such as spatial form, behavioral practice, and spiritual experience, it conducts a comprehensive analysis of its cultural adaptation mechanism. The goal is to deepen the understanding of the cultural landscapes of the Southwest Silk Road and the characteristics of religious spatial narratives.

### **3. Theoretical Foundation: Constructing the Correlation between Spatial Atmosphere and Narrative Expression**

#### **3.1 Analysis of Core Concepts**

"Spatial Atmosphere" (Yi Jing), as a comprehensive perceptual experience generated through the interaction between humans and the environment, not only encompasses the morphological organization of physical space but also integrates historical memory, cultural symbolism, and spiritual implications. It is a constructed place meaning within a specific geographical and social context<sup>[6]</sup>. In religious spaces, the creation of atmosphere often involves the synergistic layout of mountain bodies, water bodies, paths, and statues. This guides the movement, line of sight, and psychological rhythm of the viewer, forming an experiential sequence characterized by ritual sense and transcendence.

"Narrative Expression" refers to the ability of space to convey specific cultural information through the organization of symbols, sequences, and scenes. Especially in linear cultural heritage, space itself becomes a "narrator" carrying historical events, faith dissemination, and population interaction<sup>[7]</sup>. As a cross-regional cultural exchange channel, the spaces along the Southwest Silk Road are not merely paths for material movement but also media for meaning transmission. The spatial practice of Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings lies precisely in embedding Buddhist images into the magnificent landscapes and transportation nodes, constructing a narrative field that possesses both sanctity and readability. When travelers traverse this space, they undergo not only geographical displacement but also subtle religious indoctrination and cultural identification through visual guidance and psychological induction. Therefore, spatial atmosphere and narrative expression in the case of Feixian Pavilion do not exist in isolation. Instead, through the interweaving of environmental intervention, bodily perception, and cultural memory, they jointly constitute a cultural adaptation mechanism suitable for a fluid society. This provides a key theoretical fulcrum for understanding the functional evolution of ancient religious landscapes in cross-cultural contexts.

### 3.2 Relevant Theoretical Support

The theoretical construction of this study relies on multiple theoretical perspectives from the fields of human geography and art history. Phenomenological space theory emphasizes the inseparability of bodily perception and place experience, providing an analytical foundation for understanding the visual encounters and spiritual touches between travelers and cliff carvings while walking on mountain paths. The concept of "Genius Loci" proposed by Norberg-Schulz helps reveal how Feixian Pavilion shapes a sacred space with unique cultural identity through the fusion of natural landforms and artificial carvings<sup>[8]</sup>.

Simultaneously, Lefebvre's theory of the production of space points out that space is not merely a material container but a product of social relations and cultural meanings. This provides a deep framework for analyzing the religious functions and social values endowed upon the carving cluster within the Silk Road transportation network<sup>[9]</sup>. In the narrative dimension, narrative space theory posits that space itself possesses the ability to tell stories. Especially in linear paths, nodes, sequences, and landmarks jointly constitute a "spatial narrative grammar"<sup>[10]</sup>. Combining Mitchell's viewpoint of "Image Geography," the process of images being viewed and interpreted in specific geographical environments is itself a performance of cultural power and identity<sup>[11]</sup>.

Furthermore, traffic archaeology and linear cultural heritage research emphasize "cultural adaptation in motion," pointing out that religious facilities along the route often achieve effective responses to mobile populations through visual prominence, psychological solace functions, and the fusion of multi-cultural symbols. These theories collectively support a systematic interpretation of the interaction mechanism between the spatial atmosphere and traffic narrative of Feixian Pavilion, providing a solid academic basis for the analysis of its cultural adaptability.

### 3.3 Establishment of the Analytical Framework

Based on the aforementioned theoretical resources, this paper constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework integrating space, narrative, and cultural adaptation. This framework aims to systematically explain the meaning generation mechanism of the Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings in Pujiang within the context of the Southwest Silk Road. The core logical chain of this framework is "Spatial Atmosphere – Traffic Narrative – Cultural Adaptation."

First, from the material level, it analyzes the spatial composition of the carving cluster, including its site selection characteristics, visual corridors, path organization, and relationship with the mountain body. This reveals how the natural environment and artificial creation synergistically shape a place atmosphere with religious appeal. Secondly, it shifts to the narrative dimension, examining how the selection of carving subjects, sequence arrangement, and viewing methods form a specific narrative rhythm. This responds to the psychological needs and faith expectations of travelers during long treks, transforming static religious images into dynamic travel narrative experiences.

On this basis, the framework further explores how this dual construction of space and narrative achieves adaptive expression culturally. That is, on transportation arteries where multiple ethnic groups and faiths converge, it achieves meaning resonance and identity integration in cross-regional cultural dissemination through symbol compatibility, visual readability, and functional practicality. This framework emphasizes that space is not merely a background or carrier but an active participant in cultural practice. Through perception guidance, memory anchoring, and ritual embedding, it stably transmits values and order within the fluid transportation network. Thus, it provides an analytical path that is both structural and procedural for understanding the evolutionary logic of ancient religious landscapes in complex socio-geographical

environments.

#### **4. Generative Mechanisms of Spatial Atmosphere in Feixian Pavilion Cliff Carvings**

##### **4.1 Field Background: Geographical and Humanistic Environment as a Strategic Hub of the Southwest Silk Road**

Feixian Pavilion in Pujiang is located in the throat zone of transportation transitioning from the Chengdu Plain to the western Sichuan mountainous areas. It sits at a crucial node on the Lingguan Road, the western line of the Southern Silk Road, and has since ancient times been a necessary route connecting the Central Plains with Dian (Yunnan), Myanmar, and even South Asia<sup>[12]</sup>. Chang Qu of the Jin Dynasty recorded in the *Chronicles of Huayang: Records of Shu* that Linqiong (the area of present-day Pujiang) had "BuPu Water... connecting to the Western Regions." Although it did not explicitly use the name "Silk Road," it already outlined the geographical reality of this place as a hub for the circulation of goods and the movement of people.

Its geographical environment presents typical characteristics of canyon river flows. The Pujiang River winds through hills, with steep mountains on both banks. The ancient path traveled alongside the mountain and water, forming a natural linear passage corridor. This special landform not only shaped the transportation pattern within the region but also determined the distribution logic of important humanistic facilities. The location of Feixian Pavilion, leaning against the mountain and facing the water, controlling the road by the river, made it a visual landmark and resting place that passing merchants, envoys, and monks could hardly ignore during their long treks.

Historically, this region has long been at the forefront of multi-ethnic convergence and multi-cultural interaction. Ethnic groups such as Han, Qiang, and Yi migrated and blended here, while Buddhism, Taoism, and folk beliefs coexisted and symbiotically thrived, forming an open and inclusive religious atmosphere. During the Tang and Song dynasties, with the prosperity of the Southern Silk Road, economic and cultural exchanges along the route became increasingly frequent. The demand for spiritual solace and cultural markers significantly increased, providing a social foundation for the creation of religious spaces<sup>[13]</sup>. The Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings emerged precisely against this dual background of a geographical strategic pass and cultural convergence. Its site selection not only conformed to the guidance of natural terrain on the path but also profoundly responded to the psychological demands of mobile populations in arduous journeys. The organic integration of mountain, water, road, and images transformed this field beyond a mere geographical node. It evolved into a composite cultural space carrying memory, transmitting faith, and condensing identity, laying a profound environmental foundation for the subsequent generation of spatial atmosphere<sup>[14]</sup>.

##### **4.2 Characteristics of Spatial Pattern Creation**

The spatial pattern of Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings demonstrates a high degree of wisdom in creation that depends on natural terrain. Its overall layout is not an independent artificial structure but the result of deep coupling among the mountain body, river flow, path, and carving cluster. The carving area unfolds along the limestone cliffs on the right bank of the Pujiang River, making full use of the naturally extending rock faces in the east-west direction to form a continuous and rhythmic visual interface.

The distribution of niches is not homogeneous but organically organized according to rock structure, visibility, and direction of travel. Large mainstatues, such as Guanyin and Maitreya, which have a broad faith base, are concentrated at key turning points or places with open views, constituting visual climaxes and spiritual anchor points in the spatial sequence. Simultaneously, the ancient path and the river surface constitute dual viewing paths. This allows the carvings to present dynamic visual effects at different distances, angles, and

speeds of movement: when viewed from afar, they appear as an integral sacred silhouette; when read up close, one can perceive niche details and religious narratives meticulously. This multi-perspective viewing mode formed through path movement is also relatively common in early cliff carvings in the Sichuan region<sup>[15]</sup>.

Some carvings also guide viewers to approach through artificial facilities such as plank roads and platforms, forming an experiential rhythm from far to near, from motion to stillness. Notably, clear rest areas and inscription spaces are reserved within the space, indicating that it is not only a place for religious worship but also a social node for travelers to stop, communicate, and entrust their prayers. This spatial organization method, which coordinates natural conditions, bodily movement, and spiritual demands, enables Feixian Pavilion to transcend a single religious function. It evolves into a composite atmosphere field possessing guidance, participation, and symbolism, achieving the effective landing and meaning extension of sacred space within a fluid traffic context.

#### **4.3 Analysis of Perception and Experience of Spatial Atmosphere**

Spatial experience gradually transforms into "place" through bodily movement, sensory perception, and emotional memory. Human perception comes not only from vision but also includes sound and bodily experience<sup>[16]</sup>. The perception and experience of the spatial atmosphere at Feixian Pavilion is a continuous process of multi-sensory synergy and dynamic generation. Its core lies in the interaction between travelers and specific spatial fields during movement.

Guo Xi of the Song Dynasty proposed the aesthetic ideal of landscapes being "walkable, viewable, tourable, and habitable" in *Lofty Message of Forests and Streams*. The creation of Feixian Pavilion is precisely a three-dimensional practice of this theory: it not only allows people to "view" but also, due to the penetration of the ancient path, allows people to "walk"; due to the terraced resting areas, allows people to "dwell"; and due to its profound atmosphere, allows people to "tour."

At the visual level, the carvings are chiseled against the cliff, forming a staggered skyline that rises and falls with the mountain trend. As pedestrians wind along the ancient path, their line of sight experiences a rhythmic change from obstruction to sudden openness. The Buddha statues appear and disappear amidst the screening of trees and forests, reinforcing the depth and sanctity of the space. Landscape experience does not rely solely on vision but is a comprehensive environmental experience constituted by multiple senses such as sound, smell, touch, and bodily movement<sup>[17]</sup>.

Auditorily, the sound of the river water and the whistling of the wind in the mountain forests constitute a natural background sound. This creates a tension with the quiet religious atmosphere, guiding the viewer from a noisy journey into a state of introspection. In terms of touch and bodily sensation, the climbing process on steep stone steps increases bodily participation. The interweaving of fatigue and the relief upon arrival deepens the bodily memory of the theme of "crossing calamity." This experience is not a static appreciation but a narrative unfolding accompanied by the passage of time and the shift of position. The flow of natural light and shadow further endows static stone carvings with dynamic vitality. The comprehensive perception obtained by travelers at specific space-time nodes transforms the material space into a psychological landscape. This enables Feixian Pavilion to transcend a mere traffic node, becoming a place of meaning carrying emotional projection and spiritual sustenance, thus completing the transformation from a physical environment to a space of atmosphere.

## **5. Narrative Dimensions of Southwest Silk Road Traffic and Their Material Projection in Feixian Pavilion**

### **5.1 Core Narrative Themes of the Southwest Silk Road**

As a cross-regional cultural exchange channel connecting the Central Plains with South Asia and Southeast Asia, the core narrative theme of the Southwest Silk Road is not a single commercial circulation. Instead, it is a composite cultural narrative covering multiple dimensions such as material exchange, religious dissemination, ethnic migration, and political strategy<sup>[18]</sup>. On this long and arduous journey, travelers not only faced challenges from the natural environment but also experienced constant changes in language, faith, and customs. This gave rise to a universal demand for safety shelter, spiritual solace, and cultural identity.

When Du Fu of the Tang Dynasty entered Shu, he sighed, "The dangerous path has many obstacles." Lu You of the Song Dynasty, in *Record of Entry into Shu*, also frequently described the hardships of travel and dependence on shrines. These literary memories reflect the widespread psychology of "fearing the path and seeking safety" among ancient travelers. The Silk Road was not only a trade route but also an important network for religious dissemination and cultural translation. Monks, merchants, and rulers jointly promoted the spread and localization of Buddhism in areas along the route. Simultaneously, the intervention of official envoys and local governance endowed the road with political implications of order construction and frontier integration, forming a symbolic narrative of "the reach of royal transformation." The Silk Road formed a cross-cultural exchange network and an inclusive social structure, where different religions and ethnic groups formed a cultural environment of mutual trust and cooperation through exchange<sup>[19]</sup>.

At the folk level, the group passage of merchant gangs and the market interactions of multiple ethnic groups nurtured a community narrative based on mutual trust and coexistence, emphasizing mutual assistance, oath-taking, and shared memory during the journey. These narrative themes constantly superimposed and interwove in fluid spaces, jointly shaping the cultural background of the Southwest Silk Road. The Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings are precisely the material carrier produced against this complex narrative background. Their very existence is a response to the hardships of the journey, a witness to the dissemination of faith, and a tacit indication of cross-cultural coexistence. The carving cluster, through the localized presentation of religious imagery, transforms abstract Silk Road narratives into tangible, visible, and participatory spatial practices. This allows passing crowds to access the grand cultural context during brief stops, gaining psychological belonging and meaning confirmation, thereby anchoring spiritual coordinates in the fluid history between mountains and rivers.

### **5.2 Specific Presentation of Narrative Carriers in the Space of Feixian Pavilion**

Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings transform the abstract narratives of the Southwest Silk Road into concrete material expressions through multi-level spatial and image strategies, making them narrative carriers during the journey. The selection of carving subjects has distinct universality and functionality. Images of Bodhisattvas who save from suffering and difficulties, such as Guanyin and Ksitigarbha, occupy the dominant position. This directly responds to the psychological demands of travelers for safe passage and overcoming calamities, constituting the core content of the "Shelter Narrative."

Inscriptions appearing in some niches clearly record the identities of donors, including merchants, station soldiers, and monks, among other mobile groups. These inscriptions not only record individual prayers but also embed private experiences into public space, forming a collective writing of "travel memory"<sup>[20]</sup>. In terms of spatial layout, the carving cluster unfolds linearly along the ancient path and riverbank, forming a visual sequence with a beginning, development, climax, and conclusion. This simulates the rhythm of the journey itself,

enabling viewers to experience a process from expectation to shock to contemplation during movement, realizing the spatial enactment of "journey narrative."

Some niches integrate elements of Han-transmitted Buddhism and local beliefs, such as juxtaposing Buddhist honored images with Taoist symbols or adopting regional decorative styles, reflecting an "adaptive narrative" of cultural fusion[21]. Furthermore, the high-risk location of the carvings by the river is itself a symbolic expression, implying the courage to cross dangerous paths and the dependence on supernatural powers. Through the synergistic action of image content, spatial sequences, inscribed texts, and geographical contexts, Feixian Pavilion transcends the function of mere religious worship. It evolves into a narrative field carrying Silk Road memory, transmitting cultural values, and condensing group identity, continuously recounting the faith, courage, and wisdom of coexistence in fluid history between mountains and rivers.

## **6. In-Depth Analysis of Cultural Adaptability between Spatial Atmosphere and Traffic Narrative**

### **6.1 Adaptation at the Morphological Level: Coupling of Spatial Layout and Narrative Flow**

At the morphological level, Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings demonstrate a high degree of fit between spatial layout and traffic narrative flow, reflecting the precise compliance and active guidance of religious creation towards fluid paths. Its carving cluster is not arranged in a centralized manner but is distributed linearly along the extension direction of the ancient path and the trend of the riverbank. This forms a spatial sequence parallel to the travel trajectory, allowing religious landscapes to naturally integrate into the journey process and avoiding segmentation from traffic functions.

Key niches are mostly set at path turns, slope changes, or places where the view suddenly opens up. They utilize terrain height differences and visual focal points to create narrative climaxes. For instance, large Guanyin niches are often located at nodes where travelers transition from enclosed mountain paths to open river surfaces, creating a sacred experience of "willows dark and flowers bright" (a metaphor for hope emerging from despair). This reinforces the symbolic implication of "crossing calamity and obtaining safety." Simultaneously, the orientation and height of the carvings are carefully designed. Principal statues mostly face the ancient path or the river flow, ensuring that traveling visitors can obtain clear visual contact from a dynamic perspective, achieving narrative continuity in "moving viewing."

Some areas extend staying time through artificial facilities such as plank roads and platforms, guiding viewers from "passing by" to "stopping to watch," forming a complete experience chain from distant viewing to approaching and then gazing. This spatial organization is not a static symmetrical ritual layout but takes the bodily movement of travelers as the axis. It embeds religious narratives into actual traffic flow lines, enabling spiritual indoctrination and travel experiences to unfold synchronously<sup>[22]</sup>. Thereby, the spatial form not only conforms to geographical conditions and traffic needs but also achieves a seamless connection between the creation of religious atmosphere and the promotion of traffic narrative through rhythm control, line-of-sight guidance, and behavioral induction. This demonstrates the high adaptability and narrative integration capability of ancient creation wisdom in complex linear environments.

### **6.2 Adaptation at the Functional Level: Correspondence between Site Behavior and Narrative Content**

At the functional level, Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings demonstrate a profound correspondence between site behavior and narrative content. Its space is not merely an object for visual worship but an active field supporting specific cultural practices. The layout of the carving area fully considers the actual behavioral needs of travelers during long treks. It is equipped with gentle terraces and sheltered spaces available for short rests,

allowing behaviors such as stopping, meditation, and prayer to occur naturally. This embeds religious experience into the physiological rhythm of the journey.

Dao Shi of the Tang Dynasty detailed the merit of "creating images by the roadside" in Fa Yuan Zhu Lin (Forest of Pearls in the Garden of Dharma), stating that it enables passing sentient beings to "generate faith upon seeing the image and eliminate sin barriers." This religious concept profoundly influenced the practical logic of folk carving creation, making Feixian Pavilion a typical field for practicing "roadside merit." Open spaces in front of niches often retain traces of incense and remains of offerings, indicating that spontaneous folk sacrificial activities have existed here for a long time. This reflects the continuous enactment of the core narrative of "prayer for protection – verification of response" in daily practice <sup>[23]</sup>.

The content of inscriptions mostly prays for "safe travels" and "early arrival at the destination," directly mapping the psychological anxiety and spiritual sustenance of travelers facing arduous roads. This makes the space a carrier where individual narratives and collective faith intersect. Notably, some carving subjects, such as Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and images of the Ten Kings, imply concern for "crossing the soul after death." This echoes the cultural memory of dangerous roads in the ancient southwestern mountains and the difficulty of the dead returning home, endowing the space with redemptive meaning beyond the present world. Furthermore, historical behaviors such as monks lecturing scriptures here, merchants taking oaths, and government offices erecting steles further expanded the social functions of the space. This made it a node for information transmission, trust building, and identity confirmation. This synergy of function and narrative enables Feixian Pavilion not only to provide visual religious symbols but also to activate the vitality of narratives by supporting specific behaviors, realizing cultural embedding and meaning regeneration of sacred space in a fluid society.

### **6.3 Adaptation at the Spiritual Level: Resonance between Atmospheric Ambiance and Narrative Themes**

At the spiritual level, Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings achieve a deep resonance between spatial atmospheric ambiance and traffic narrative themes. Its creation transcends material functions and visual narratives, pointing directly to the collective psychology and spiritual needs of mobile populations<sup>[24]</sup>. The carving cluster adheres to cliffs by the river, backed by towering mountain bodies and facing rushing river waters. The natural environment itself conveys a perceptual tone of sublimity, profundity, and eternity, which is isomorphic with the hardships of the journey, the impermanence of life, and the transcendence of faith.

Amidst changing light and shadow and swirling mist, the Buddha statues appear and disappear, creating a mysterious atmosphere transcending the mundane world. This provides spiritual solace to travelers in their fatigue and loneliness, reinforcing the narrative theme of "crossing calamity and obtaining safety." The concentrated presentation of merciful and saving images such as Guanyin and Ksitigarbha not only provides visual symbols but also, through the solemnity and tranquility of the overall space, guides viewers into a psychological state of introspection and prayer. This realizes the subtle influence of religious indoctrination in a non-ritual context.

Simultaneously, the phenomenon of multiple niches placed side by side and new and old layers overlapping itself constitutes a visible "narrative of time." It witnesses the relay of faith among people of different eras and identities, strengthening the individual's sense of belonging in the grand historical process. This atmospheric ambiance, shaped jointly by nature, artificiality, and behavior, makes Feixian Pavilion a spiritual station during the journey. Its sanctity does not rely on enclosed temple spaces but, in the open context of mountains and rivers, continuously responds to the deep demands of a fluid society for security, meaning, and transcendence through the synergy of environmental perception and psychological induction. This demonstrates the unique spiritual adjustment capability of religious spaces in cross-cultural transportation networks.

## 7. Conclusion and Outlook

This study, through a systematic analysis of the interactive relationship between the spatial atmosphere generation mechanism of Feixian Pavilion cliff carvings in Pujiang and the traffic narrative expression of the Southwest Silk Road, reveals the cultural adaptation logic of religious spaces in cross-regional cultural exchange channels. The research finds that Feixian Pavilion is not an isolated religious relic but is deeply embedded in the transportation network and cultural ecology of the Southern Silk Road. Its spatial creation reflects a precise response to the behavioral patterns and psychological needs of mobile populations at the morphological, functional, and spiritual levels.

Through the fit between spatial layout and travel flow, the correspondence between site function and narrative content, and the resonance between atmospheric ambiance and cultural themes, the carving cluster realized an organic unity of religious sanctity and travel practicality. It became an important medium for maintaining spiritual order during long-distance transportation. This adaptability is not only reflected in the technical levels of image selection and spatial organization but is also rooted in a profound understanding of mountain and river situations, movement rhythms, and collective memory. It demonstrates the high wisdom of ancient spatial practices in complex socio-geographical environments.

The case of Feixian Pavilion indicates that religious landscapes in linear cultural heritage are essentially dynamic cultural regulation mechanisms. Through the construction of spatial narratives, they facilitate the sharing of meaning and the integration of identity in zones of multi-cultural convergence. Looking to the future, research on similar sites should further expand interdisciplinary horizons. Combining digital restoration and perception simulation technologies will deepen the restoration of historical spatial experiences. Simultaneously, attention should be paid to the transformation paths of traditional spatial wisdom in contemporary cultural heritage interpretation and place creation, providing deeper theoretical support for understanding the continuity of human-land relationship.

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### **Author's Profile**

I am currently pursuing a degree in Environmental Design at the School of Fine Arts and Calligraphy, Sichuan Normal University.

### **Academic Background and Research Interests:**

Deeply engaged in the interdisciplinary field of cultural heritage conservation and environmental design, I specialize in the historical evolution and contemporary value reconstruction of human settlements in southwestern mountainous regions. I research focuses on religious landscape nodes within linear cultural heritage systems, such as the Southwest Silk Road. I am proficient in applying theoretical frameworks including Space Syntax, Phenomenology, and Narrative Design to decode the spatial genes and genius spirit of place of traditional cliff carving clusters.

Aiming to intervene through design methodologies, I work seeks to excavate the profound interactive logic of "Route-Image-People" within traditional transportation corridors. Ultimately, I research strives to provide robust theoretical foundations and strategic design proposals for the holistic conservation of regional heritage and the sustainable integration of culture and tourism.