The Connections between Huashan Rock Art Site of China and Ancient Egypt

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Abstract: The Huashan rock art site may be considered to be one of the most impressive pre-Historic painted panels of the world. The site is located in the Zuojiang River valley of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, a border area of south-west China, neighbouring Vietnam. This article tries to explore the possible connection between the landscape of the Huashan rock art site , cosmological beliefs of the Luo Yue people and ancient Egypt's the Valley of the Kings, cosmological beliefs of the ancient Egyptian.

The Huashan rock art site of China is located in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, neighbouring with Vietnam. It is generally believed that the rock art at the Huashan site was created between the Warring States Period (403–221 BCE) and Eastern Han dynasty (26–220 CE), by an ethnic group named Luo Yue (骆越). This article tries to explore the possible connection between the landscape of the Huashan rock art site, cosmological beliefs of the Luo Yue people and ancient Egypt's the Valley of the Kings, cosmological beliefs of the ancient Egyptian.

The Huashan rock art site may be considered to be one of the most impressive pre-Historic painted panels of the world. The site is located in the Zuojiang River valley of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, a border area of south-west China, neighbouring Vietnam. This area is well-known for its picturesque landscapes, featuring high limestone mountains. About eighty-one rock art sites have been discovered throughout the valley; the Huashan rock art site is arguably one of the most spectacular (GCRB 2011: 3) (Fig. 1). Huashan is called 'Pay Laiz' in the local Zhuang language, which literally means 'a mountain with colourful paintings'. It is situated at the south-western corner of a series of limestone peaks. At the foot of the mountain the wide and calm Mingjiang River, a tributary of the Zuojiang River, approaches from the south-west and makes a sharp turn to the north-west.

On the precipitous western cliff of the Huashan mountain, which

overhangs the running water, more than 1800 rock art motifs are painted, covering an area of more than 4000 square metres. It is thought to be the largest rock art panel in the world (Liu 2006: 23). The paintings of the Huashan rock art site are highly standardised. All the images are monochrome, painted in a brownish-red colour, and represented in two dimensions without a sense of perspective or depth of field. (It is similar to the tomb pictures of the Valley of the Kings in meaning and painting pigments).

Scholars have often argued that the effort people made to paint the magnificent images by taking high risks climbing the precipitous cliffs cannot have been driven by mundane needs. Indeed, a spiritual motive seems to have been behind the production of the Huashan rock art and therefore an understanding of the ancient Luo Yue people's religion is a necessary key to unlock the site's meaning. There is no evidence that the ancient Luo Yue people had a writing system, and we know little about their customs from the Chinese written sources (Luo 2006: 23). After the Han conquest in 111 BCE, the Han Chinese culture extensively influenced this area, greatly affecting the indigenous Luo Yue culture. Many of their religious beliefs were lost through time but some were maintained (Qin 2006: 256) and it is argued here that these allow us to better understand the production of the Huashan rock art.

Based on historical records and the studies of modern Zhuang and

Muong people, scholars defined the Luo Yue's religion as animism and ancestor worship (Qin 2006: 256; Dao 1976: 235). Animism is a religion focused on the belief that nature includes spiritual beings, sacred forces and similar extraordinary phenomena. It encompasses the belief that souls exist not only in humans but also in natural objects, including animals, plants, rocks, geographic features such as mountains or rivers, or other entities of the natural environment (Birx 2006: 80). Ancestor worship is also referred to as a form of ancestral cult. Beliefs of this cult centre on the ability of the dead to protect kinsmen in return for worship from them (Birx 2006: 72). The two forms of religion are not incompatible in the same society, although anthropology has seen these as disparate religions when, in fact, they are just two different religious practices. Both animism and ancestor worship still exist today among the Zhuang people, Muong people, and some other ethnic groups related to the Luo Yue people.

In Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the very diffuse topography has made the Zhuang peoples live in relatively small groups. Environmental and cultural diversity has promoted different spiritual practices. The local animistic cults address a rich variety of spiritual beings, and there is no clear division between such spiritual beings and local gods (Yu 2004: 10). Chinese scholars have categorised the spiritual beings and gods worshipped by the Zhuang people into mainly four

groups, each with a most important god representing the rest, as listed below (Liao 2002: 6).

Religious Beliefs Among the Yuo Luo's Descendants
(1) Thunder: represents all things related to the sky, such as celestial beings and all types of weather.
(2) Water: represents all things related to the earth, such as stone and soil, river and fire.
(3) Flower: represents fertility.
(4) Frog: represents all animals, especially those have a close relationship with agriculture.

In Zhuang people's mythology, the four gods are closely related by another god, Baeuqloegdoz, the god of ancestors. Baeuqloegdoz, brother of the thunder god and the water god, uncle of the frog god, and husband of the flower goddess, is unique in his human nature, as he is considered by the Zhuang people today to be the great ancestor and the first Zhuang individual. Below, the ethnographic sources regarding the three elements of thunder, water and frog, along with the god of ancestors, and how scholars have related them to the depictions in the Huashan rock art site are explored. It is argued that rather than the rock art site being related to just one of the three elements, as seems to be suggested by current scholarship, the site is actually related to all three elements.

Among all the spiritual beings, the thunder god has been viewed as the most important. According to the origin myths of the Zhuang people, at the beginning, the world exploded into three parts. The upper

part became the sky, where all the deities reside. It is ruled by Duzbyaj, the thunder god. The middle part became the earth, where humans live. It is led by Baeuqloegdoz, the god of ancestors. The lower part became the water, where the monsters live, and it is ruled by Duzngieg, the water god (Luo 2006: 173).

In subtropical regions, floods and droughts, both related to water, alternatively affect agricultural production. Like thunder, water also plays a crucial role in the Zhuang culture. However, unlike the thunder god Duzbyaj, the water god Duzngieg has been viewed as evil. In the Zhuang mythology, Duzngieg is the largest water monster, responsible for causing floods and droughts. Scholars interpret Duzngieg as a water snake, a rhinoceros or a crocodile (Qiu 1996: 298; Luo 2006: 173; Liao 2002: 194). According to historical records written in the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), the Luo Yue people tattooed their bodies with patterns of water predators as a way to deter them (Chapuis 1995: 7).

In Zhuang mythology, the middle part of the world 'earth', where human beings live, also has a representative god, Baeuqloegdoz, the god of ancestors. However, the worship of Baeuqloegdoz is more closely related to the religious practice of ancestor worship than to that of animism, since Baeuqloegdoz is viewed by the Zhuang people as their first ancestor (Liang and Liao 2005: 1). According to legends, Baeuqloegdoz defeated his two brothers, the thunder god Duzbyaj and

the water god Duzngieg, and created human beings with the goddess Mehmyok, who has become the flower goddess representing fertility and childbirth (Liao 2002: 118). Baeuqloegdoz has been greatly respected by the Zhuang people. (It is similar to the ancient Egyptian cosmology: when thinking of the shape of the cosmos, the Egyptians saw the earth as a flat expanse of land, personified by the god Geb, over which arched the sky goddess Nut. The two were separated by Shu, the god of air. Beneath the earth lay a parallel underworld and undersky, and beyond the skies lay the infinite expanse of Nu, the chaos that had existed before creation. The Egyptians also believed in a place called the Duat, a mysterious region associated with death and rebirth, that may have lain in the underworld or in the sky. Each day, Ra traveled over the earth across the underside of the sky, and at night he passed through the Duat to be reborn at dawn.

In Egyptian belief, this cosmos was inhabited by three types of sentient beings. One was the gods; another was the spirits of deceased humans, who existed in the divine realm and possessed many of the gods' abilities. Living humans were the third category, and the most important among them was the pharaoh, who bridged the human and divine realms.

The Egyptians believed that the phenomena of nature were divine forces in and of themselves. These deified forces included the elements,

animal characteristics, or abstract forces. The Egyptians believed in a pantheon of gods, which were involved in all aspects of nature and human society. Their religious practices were efforts to sustain and placate these phenomena and turn them to human advantage. This polytheistic system was very complex, as some deities were believed to exist in many different manifestations, and some had multiple mythological roles. Conversely, many natural forces, such as the sun, were associated with multiple deities. The diverse pantheon ranged from gods with vital roles in the universe to minor deities or "demons" with very limited or localized functions. It could include gods adopted from foreign cultures, and sometimes humans: deceased Pharaohs were believed to be divine, and occasionally, distinguished commoners such as Imhotep also became deified.) .

What are the unusual features in the landscape of the Huashan rock art site? The site is situated on the almost vertical cliff of the Huashan mountain besides the Mingjiang River, which runs a sharp turn from the south-west to the north-west at the foot of the mountain. The painted cliff, surrounded by mountain ranges in the north and east, overhangs the river and faces directly to a flat field on the other side of the river. The river is wide and the water flows gently. Viewed from the opposite bank, the triangular-shaped Huashan mountain is clearly reflected on the surface of the river. As archaeologist Jiang Zhenming noticed during his

survey of the site, 'a dense crowd of red-painted figures thickly dotting the cliff mingled together in red colour, as if they were flaming up under the red glow of the setting sun, jumping on the river, dancing on the cliff and ascending to the sky' (Jiang 1991: 11).

I propose that the unusual features in the landscape of the Huashan rock art site were viewed as hierophanies by the Luo Yue people, and then they produced rock art as a way to access the sacred power embodied by the features. According to the detailed description of all the rock art sites distributed in Zuojiang River valley (Qin et al. 1987: 25–122), compared with other painted mountains, only Huashan is of a triangular shape, which provides a solemn ambience as if it peaked directly into the sky. About 68.3% of Zuojiang rock art sites are located beside a turn of the river (Qin et al. 1987: 21). In antiquity, the turns on the watercourse were perceived as the places where the water monsters dwelt as boat wrecks always happened in such places. So the location of the Huashan rock art site probably indicates the Luo Yue's beliefs concerning the cult of water. Furthermore, while the Huashan mountain is half-surrounded by ridges, a flat field appears on the other side of the river, embraced by the peacefully running water and facing the precipitous cliff directly. In such a sense, the mountain, river and field have been combined in a way the ancient Luo Yue people might have viewed as sacred. Moreover, the orientations of the natural features

might have also played a part as to make the place significant.

FIGURE 1
A frontal view of the Huashan mountain

HUASHAN ROCK ART
Landscape around the Huashan Rock Art Site

Cosmology
The Huashan Rock Art Site

Huashan Rock Art

Now let us go back to Egypt. The Valley of the Kings, also known as the Valley of the Gates of the Kings, is a valley in Egypt where, for a period of nearly 500 years from the 16th to 11th century BC, rock cut tombs were excavated for the Pharaohs and powerful nobles of the New Kingdom (the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Dynasties of Ancient Egypt).

The valley stands on the west bank of the Nile, opposite Thebes (modern Luxor), within the heart of the Theban Necropolis. The Theban Necropolis is a necropolis on the west bank of the Nile, opposite Thebes (Luxor) in Upper Egypt. It was used for ritual burials for much of the Pharaonic period, especially during the New Kingdom. The wadi consists of two valleys, East Valley (where the majority of the royal tombs are situated) and West Valley.

Aerial view of the Theban Necropolis

Location of the Valley of the Kings in the Theban Hills, west of the Nile, October 1988
(red arrow shows location)

Panorama of the Valley of the Kings, looking north

The Theban Hills are dominated by the peak of al-Qurn, known to the Ancient Egyptians as *ta dehent*, or 'The Peak'. It has a pyramid-shaped appearance, and it is probable that this echoed the pyramids of the Old Kingdom, more than a thousand years prior to the first royal burials carved here. Al-Qurn (lit. "the horn"), is the highest point (420 m) in the Theban Hills, located on the western bank of the Nile, opposite Thebes, modern Luxor. Its ancient name was Ta Dehent, or "the peak". It has an

almost pyramidal shape when viewed from the entrance to the Valley of the Kings, and therefore some Egyptologists believe it may have been the reason for choosing the location as a royal necropolis.

Al-Qurn dominates the valley

So I propose that , from geography we can see the Huashan rock art site of China resembles the Valley of the Kings.

Now we can try to find the meaning of the picture below.

A part of the Huashan Rock Art panel

The centre of the picture above

These figures are represented either in frontal view or in profile, all with the same posture: arms stretched up at the elbow and legs semi-squatting. With a strong sense of uniformity, the typical composition of the images is one of a large frontal view of a distinctly 'human' figure that dominates the centre, mostly with a 'sword' hanging

at the waist or held in hand, (I think , after the Han conquest in 111 BCE,the Han Chinese culture extensively influenced this area, greatly affecting the indigenous Luo Yue culture, and a 'sword' hanging at the waist or held in hand was affected by Han Chinese culture.) a 'dog' under the feet(actually is Anubis in Luo Yue, because a dog resembles Anubis), with a 'kerchief' wearing in head (actually is nemes in Luo Yue, and the nemes is the striped headcloth worn by pharaohs in ancient Egypt. It covered the whole crown and back of the head and nape of the neck (sometimes also extending a little way down the back) and had lappets, two large flaps which hung down behind the ears and in front of both shoulders. It was sometimes combined with the double crown, as it is on the statues of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel. The earliest depiction of the nemes, along with a uraeus, is the ivory label of Den from the 1st Dynasty. It is not a crown in itself, but still symbolizes the pharaoh's power), and an object like an umbrella holding in the right hand (actually is sekhem-scepter in Luo Yue, the sekhem-scepter is a type of ritual scepter in ancient Egypt. It is a symbol of authority and is often incorporated in names and words associated with power and control. The sekhem-scepter (symbolizing "the powerful") is related to the *hrp*-scepter (symbolizing "the controller") and the *aba*-scepter (symbolizing "the commander"), which are all represented with the same hieroglyphic symbol.These scepters resembled a flat paddle on a

papyrus-umbel handle. Its symbolic role may have originated in Abydos as a fetish of Osiris. After the 3rd Dynasty, the sekhem appeared in the royal names of the pharaohs, and later in the titles of queens and princesses as well. When the king held a sekhem-scepter in his right hand, he would usually hold a mace or censer in the left.

From the earliest times, viziers and other officials of important rank held the sekhem, symbolizing the individual's successful life and prestigious position. Such officials were often portrayed holding the scepter in the course of performing their duties. If they held the scepter in their right hand, they would usually hold a staff in the left hand. The classic Egyptian funerary statue depicted the deceased with a staff in one hand, and the sekhem in the other. As a scepter of office, a pair of eyes were carved on the upper part of the staff.

Osiris was often called "the Great Sekhem" or "Foremost of Powers". Hence, the sekhem was often used as a symbol of the underworld deity. This probably led to the scepter also becoming an emblem of Anubis. The sekhem-scepter was sacred to Anubis in the temple of Hu (known as the "Enclosure of the Sekhem" (hwt-shm)). Anubis is frequently depicted in his manifestation of a reclining dog with the sekhem-scepter behind him. In such depictions, the scepter is often portrayed with an elongated head. The scepter was also associated with Khentiamentiu (Chief of the Westerners), another deity who was especially associated with the royal

cemetery. In this type of iconographic representation, the sekhem is often given two eyes, which were carved or painted on the scepter's upper part as a symbol indicating that it was the manifestation of divine power.)

Khasekhemwy, Pharaoh of 2nd Dynasty's serekh.

The pharaoh held sekhem-scepter, and the people of lower left corner were similar to the people in the Huashan Rock Art Site of China with arms stretched up at the elbow and legs semi-squatting.

Sekhem-scepter unearthed from the Tomb of Tutankhamun

The pharaoh of the Fourth Dynasty

and a bronze drum-like object nearby (It resembles the drums used in the Beautiful Feast of the Valley in ancient Egypt), surrounded by lines of smaller profile 'human' figures without 'weapons'.

Now let us see another picture of the Huashan rock art site of China.

A picture of Huashan Rock Art Site of China

In the middle of the picture above, is a six-pointed star, it means king or high lord in ancient Egypt. In the left of the picture is a bronze drum-like object (It resembles the drums used in the Beautiful Feast of the Valley in ancient Egypt) .

Drums used in the Beautiful Feast of the Valley

Besides, the ancient Chinese character 越 (Yue) in Luo Yue (骆越) is completely an ancient Egyptian hieroglyph:

越

Bronze (金文编裏的字) Characters

B01747	B01748	B01749	B01750	B01751

In sum, we can see the connection between the landscape of the Huashan rock art site ,cosmological beliefs of the Luo Yue people and ancient Egypt's the Valley of the Kings, cosmological beliefs of the ancient Egyptian. For example, the dominant human figures of each 'scene' could be interpreted as the depictions of great leaders in Luo Yue people's memory.

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