

Theoretical Origins, Philosophical Reconstruction, and Contemporary Value of Zen Buddhism's "No Words"

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the theoretical origins of the Zen Buddhist concept of "No Words" in Zen scriptures, delving into profound doctrines through texts such as the Platform Sutra and the Five Lamps Meeting at the Source. Subsequently, it reconstructs the argumentation within a philosophical discourse framework, restoring the Ontological framework of Zen philosophy centered on "Mind". In this process, the research demonstrates two possible approaches to "No Words": the consciousness-only doctrine with Mind as the Noumenon and the Prajñā Emptiness view employing "Contemplating Emptiness" as the method. Finally, the study transcends traditional Buddhist doctrinal discourse to examine the contemporary value of "No Words" in relation to the "Philosophy of Image" in Dunhuang Grottoes sculpture ideology.

1. Introduction

"No Words" is either the most representative teaching of Zen Buddhism or a philosophical form of epistemology that describes ineffable knowledge. Scholars have long extensively studied various fields, delving deeply into different areas. As the Buddhist sect with the most Chinese characteristics within Han Buddhism, Zen Buddhism completed the final form of Buddhism's Sinicization. Its ideas are deeply embedded in the core of traditional Chinese culture, influencing the expression forms of Chinese philosophical thought: From exploring the external world of the subject, we return to the enlightenment and clarity of the inner essence. This article will first return to the original texts of Buddhist scriptures, thoroughly examining and analyzing their original theoretical meanings to restore their initial historical form. It aims to understand the intrinsic theoretical logic behind their proposal within the perspective of religious doctrine studies. We can then reconstruct two paths within the text: one that relies on the intuitive meditation's profound cognition, which depends on the essence of the Mind and sudden enlightenment to Emptiness. After constructing this aesthetic path of epistemology, we place it in the context of Dunhuang Grottoes Art "image philosophy" for comparative study, thereby obtaining a unique research approach.

2. The Origin of the "No Words" Theory in Various Zen Scriptures

First, it is necessary to conduct a detailed textual investigation of the origin of "not establishing words and letters" in Buddhist scriptures. The Five Lamps Meeting at the Source(Wudeng

Huiyuan) , Volume 1, records:

“At the assembly on Vulture Peak, the World-Honored One held up a flower and showed it to the assembly. At that time, all remained silent, but the Venerable Mahakasyapa broke into a smile. The World-Honored One said, 'I possess the treasury of the true Dharma eye, the wondrous Mind of Nirvana, the true form of no-form, the subtle Dharma gate, not established upon words and letters, a special transmission outside the teachings, which I now entrust to Mahakasyapa.'”[1]

This passage documents the origin story of Chan Buddhism's "not establishing words and letters, a special transmission outside the teachings." The subtle Dharma gate should be transmitted Mind-to-Mind, not relying on words.

The Platform Sutra (Prajna Chapter) : Huineng states, "The wondrous principles of all Buddhas have nothing to do with words and letters," and "The original Nature itself possesses Prajna wisdom; by constantly observing and illuminating with one's own wisdom, there is no need to rely on words and letters." [2] By illuminating the original Nature with the Mind, one need not depend on words.

Ancient Ancestors' Discourses(Guzunsu Yulu) , Volume 1: Baizhang Huaihai's stance is even more radical: " The Mahayana and Vaipulya scriptures are like sweet dew, yet also like poison. If one can digest them, they are sweet dew; if not, they are poison." One should "uphold the Mind, not affairs; uphold practice, not Dharma; speak of people, not words; speak of meaning, not texts." [3][Baizhang Huaihai's Recorded Sayings]

Ancient Ancestors' Discourses (Guzunsu Yulu) , Volume 2: Huangbo Xiyun asserts, "The teachings of the three vehicles are merely medicine suited to the occasion, expounded as appropriate, provisionally established, each differing from the others." "There is no fixed Dharma of the Tathagata that can be spoken," and thus "one method, one teaching" cannot be "interpreted by clinging to the text." [3]

All Zen masters have expounded on "not establishing words and letters," but how can this "not establishing words and letters" be achieved?

In the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra , chapter "Entering the Dharma Gate of Nonduality," Vimalakīrti asks the assembly of Bodhisattvas: What is entering the Dharma gate of Nonduality? Thirty-two Bodhisattvas each express thirty-two kinds of "Nonduality" according to their understanding. Finally, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva asks Vimalakīrti: What is the Bodhisattva's entry into the Dharma gate of Nonduality? Vimalakīrti remains silent. Mañjuśrī praises this, declaring that the absence of words and language is the true Dharma gate of Nonduality.

Xuanzang's translation states: "Though what you all say is good, in my view, your explanations still fall into duality. If Bodhisattvas have no words, no speech, no expression, no indication, are free from all disputation, and transcend all discrimination—this is awakening to the Dharma gate of Nonduality." [4]

Thus, "no words, no speech, no expression, no indication, free from all disputation, transcending all discrimination" is the true entry into the Dharma gate of Nonduality. Clearly, the use of language and words would impair the state of "Nonduality," for as soon as there is verbal expression, one falls into the dualistic views of Existence and Non-existence. However, this does not mean the outright prohibition of linguistic forms, but rather that the highest state of Nonduality cannot be grasped through linguistic argumentation. Once argumentation arises, one falls into subjective conjecture and the duality of self and other. Applying this theory to the art of the Dunhuang Grottos, we see that artistic depictions transcend the verbal argumentation opposed in Buddhism, conveying experiential understanding through the narrative ethics of painting and sculpture. This allows the principle of "Nonduality" to avoid logical pitfalls while intuitively communicating its meaning to devotees.

We further ask: If "not establishing words and letters" is the highest expression of "Nonduality," then what is the foundation upon which the wordless and speechless "Nonduality" is established?

Ancient Ancestors' Discourses (Guzunsu Yulu) ,Volume 3, a question is posed: "Vimalakīrti remained silent, and Mañjuśrī praised this, saying, 'This is truly entering the Dharma gate of Nonduality.' What does this mean?" The master replies: "The Dharma gate of Nonduality is your Original Mind. Speaking or Not Speaking involves arising and cessation. When there is no speech, nothing is displayed, hence Mañjuśrī's praise." [3][Record of Huangbo Xiyun of Wanling]

Huangbo Xiyun holds that the "Dharma gate of Nonduality" is the "Original Mind." "Speaking" and "Not Speaking" are dualistic categories. If the motivation to express a view arises, this itself entails arising and cessation. Therefore, without words or speech, without display or recognition, the "Original Mind" is Self-evident and Nondual.

Another asks: "If Vimalakīrti does not speak, does sound cease to exist?" The master replies: "Speech is silence, silence is speech; speech and silence are Nondual. Thus, the true Nature of sound is also without cessation. What Mañjuśrī originally heard also does not cease. Therefore, the Tathāgata is always speaking—there has never been a time when he does not speak. The Tathāgata's speaking is the Dharma, the Dharma is speaking; Dharma and speaking are Nondual. Even the two bodies of reward and transformation, Bodhisattvas and śrāvakas, mountains, rivers, earth, waterbirds, and trees—all simultaneously expound the Dharma. Thus, speech is speaking, silence is speaking; though speaking all day, there has never been speaking. Since it is so, silence is taken as the fundamental." [3][Record of Huangbo Xiyun of Wanling]

Here, he encounters a challenge: If silent non-speech is the highest state of "Nonduality," does this mean language and sound must be utterly negated? Or does "sound" thereby become annihilated, its meaning erased? Huangbo Xiyun's response is: Speech and silence are Nondual; the true Nature of sound is without cessation. This is because both "speech" and "silence" return to the One Mind. Under the unifying function of the "Original Mind," the Tathāgata's teaching is ceaseless and universal, manifesting in all forms and expressions. The boundaries of time, space, and individual differences dissolve. The dichotomy between "Speech" and "Silence" also dissolves—they are Nondual, yet "Silence" is closer to the essence of the Dharma. Here, the concept of "Original Mind" is crucial. It is precisely the synthesizing function of "Mind" that allows one to perceive all Dharmas by perceiving the "Mind." This is also the foundational theoretical support for Zen's doctrine of "awakening the Mind to see its true Nature."

In the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra (Chapter on Impermanence, Part Three), there is an extensive discussion on "why one should not cling to words":

The Bodhisattva Mahāmāti once again addressed the Buddha, saying: "Bhagavān, in the Buddha's teachings, there is a distinction made between grasping and non-grasping, between Non-arising and Non-ceasing, and it is said that this is another name for the Tathāgata. Bhagavān, please explain to me—if Non-arising and Non-ceasing are Nothingness, how can they be called another name for the Tathāgata? As the Bhagavān has said, all Dharmas neither arise nor cease—this must mean falling into the views of Existence and Non-existence. Bhagavān, if a Dharma does not arise, it cannot be grasped; if there is not the slightest Dharma, who then is the Tathāgata? I beseech the Bhagavān to expound this for me." [5]

Bodhisattva Mahāmāti's challenge to the Buddha has two aspects: first, "Non-arising and Non-ceasing" is "Nothingness"; second, "Non-arising and Non-ceasing" falls into the dualistic views of "Existence" and "Non-existence." That is to say, how should the supreme Dharma of "Non-arising and Non-ceasing" in Buddhist doctrine be expressed? If "Non-arising and Non-ceasing" is an absolute state of Emptiness transcending Nothingness, then it is "Nothingness"—the Dharma has never come into being, and thus there can be no talk of the Tathāgata teaching or transmitting the Dharma. If one clings to the literal interpretation of "Non-arising and Non-ceasing," establishing names and labels, then "Non-arising" becomes "Non-existence," and "Non-ceasing" becomes "Existence," thereby falling into the dualistic views

of "Existence" and "Non-existence."

The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra speaks of the "Eighteen Emptinesses," among which is the "Emptiness of Beginninglessness." Nāgārjuna's MahāPrajñāpāramitā Śāstra, Volume 31 explains: "The Emptiness of Beginninglessness means that all sentient Beings and Dharmas in the world have No Beginning." It further states: "Now, the Emptiness of Beginninglessness is used to refute the view of Beginninglessness, yet without falling into the view of having a Beginning." Mou Zongsan argues that "Beginninglessness" refers to the conditionality of dependent origination, which cannot be fixed to any definite Beginning, yet one should not cling to "Beginninglessness" as if it were a real entity. If the concept of "Beginninglessness" is established, it leads to "infinity": "Because it is infinite, if it is infinite, there is no end. If there is no infinity and no end, then there is also no middle. If there is no Beginning, it refutes the omniscient ones." [6] Without Beginning, end, or middle, one cannot know the Beginning, thereby refuting the omniscient ones. The Buddha is the omniscient one, all-knowing, fully aware, and thus cannot be said to be without Beginning. If two opposing concepts are established—homogeneously speaking of "Beginning" and "Beginninglessness"—it violates the "Middle Way," akin to Kant's critique of the first antinomy. It also undermines the Buddha's wisdom, rendering his teachings an unnecessary construct.

Thus, the ultimate form of describing "Dharma" is to refrain from fixed definitions. It can be seen that Nāgārjuna's MahāPrajñāpāramitā Śāstra ultimately grounds Emptiness in the doctrine of "dependent origination and Emptiness." The "Eighteen Emptinesses" universally negate internal and external phenomena, time and space, and logical constructs, ultimately attributing the generative meaning of the world to the indeterminacy of "dependent origination." Historically, this precedes the establishment of the "Mind" as the fundamental reality in Chan Buddhism. Let us now examine how the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra responds.

The Bhagavān's reply is as follows: "I declare that the Tathāgata is not Nothingness, nor is it grasping Non-arising and Non-ceasing, nor is it dependent on conditions, nor is it without meaning. I declare that Non-arising is another name for the Tathāgata's Mind-made Dharma-body..." [5]

What is "Non-arising"? It is not that the Dharma has never arisen, nor is it a literal interpretation of "Non-arising" and "Non-ceasing," nor is it dependent on conditions and devoid of intrinsic Nature, nor is it that the Dharma is inherently meaningless. Rather, "Non-arising" is another name for the Tathāgata's "Mind-made Dharma-body," an explanation of the existential state of the "Thusness" (tathatā) Dharma-body. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra speaks of the "Three Natures": the "Imagined Nature," the "Dependent Nature," and the "Perfected Nature." The "Imagined Nature" arises from "Appearances," divided into "attachment to objective appearances" and "attachment to nominal appearances." The "Dependent Nature" arises from conditions. The "Perfected Nature" transcends all distinctions of names and appearances, realized through the noble wisdom of thusness. Thus, "nominal and objective distinctions pertain to the two Natures; right wisdom and thusness constitute the Perfected Nature." The Tathāgata's "Mind-made Dharma-body" is the supreme reality of "Thusness" as the "Perfected Nature." Only when the individual "Mind" transcends "Mind-Consciousness" (Storehouse Consciousness, Manas, and the First Six Consciousnesses) can it realize the "Thusness" of the "True Mind" through "Right Wisdom."

3. The Foundation of the "No Words" Philosophical System: "Mind" as the Ontology

As the above discussion shows, why is it possible to "not establish words"? Because the ontological concept of "True Suchness" of the "Mind" is established. The "True Suchness" attained through cultivation and realization—the Noumenal Nature of the Mind—is also the state of "Non-duality."

The Record of the Masters and Disciples of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra states: "All Dharmas arise

solely due to Deluded Thoughts and thus manifest distinctions. If one departs from the activity of thought, there are no characteristics of any realm. Therefore, all Dharmas, from the very Beginning, transcend the characteristics of verbal expression, names, and mental engagement. They are ultimately equal, unchanging, indestructible, and are nothing but the One Mind. Hence, it is called "True Suchness." [7][Vol. 1]

The "Activity of Thought" inherently lacks characteristics of any realm; it is only due to the motivating cause of "Deluded Thoughts" that distinctions arise. The "True Suchness" of the "One Mind" is fundamentally beyond verbal expression, names, and mental engagement—equal, unchanging, and indestructible. The Treatise on the Perfection of Consciousness-Only (Vol. 9) states: "True' means real, manifesting non-falsity; 'Suchness' means eternally thus, signifying no alteration. This reality, eternally abiding as the Nature of all Dharmas, is called 'True Suchness.'"

The academic community generally interprets "True Suchness" as the eternal, unchanging true essence, noumenon, and truth of all phenomena, both mundane and supramundane. Here, the "Mind" and "True Suchness" are interconnected—capable of being cultivated and realized.

The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna states: "All verbal expressions are Provisional Names without reality, merely following Deluded Thoughts and thus ungraspable. The term 'True Suchness' also has no characteristics. It is called the ultimate of verbal expression, using words to dispel words. This Noumenal body of True Suchness has nothing to negate, for all Dharmas are entirely True Suchness. Nor is there anything to establish, for all Dharmas are identical to suchness. Know that all Dharmas are inexpressible and inconceivable; hence, they are called 'True Suchness.'" [8][Vol. 1]

"Verbal expression" is a "Provisional Name," arising from "Deluded Thoughts," and cannot describe the noumenon of True Suchness. "True Suchness" exists within all Dharmas, and all Dharmas are identical to "True Suchness." The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna introduces the concept of "One Mind opening two gates." The individual Mind is divided into the "Gate of Arising and Easing" and the "gate of True Suchness". That is, the "Tathāgatagarbha" as the pure noumenon can manifest concretely within each individual—every being inherently possesses the True Suchness of the Original Mind, though it is obscured by the Mind of arising and ceasing, making it difficult to manifest. Therefore, by closing the gate of arising and ceasing and opening the gate of True Suchness, eliminating delusion and preserving truth, one can access the Tathāgatagarbha of True Suchness. Thus, there is no need for verbal expression; instead, introspection of the Original Mind is required to uncover the deeply hidden "True Suchness."

Yang Weizhong argues: "'Mind' is both the subject of liberation and Buddhahood for sentient beings and the ultimate basis for the 'Arising' and 'Existence' of all 'Phenomena' in the world. Therefore, the noumenon of Mind-Nature established by the various schools of Sui-Tang Buddhism serves a dual role: it is both the noumenon in the 'Humanistic' and cultivation sense and the noumenon of the phenomenal world." [9]

"Taking the Mind-substance as the foundation, the integration of the principle-substance into the Mind-substance forms the 'Noumenon of Mind-Nature'—this is one of the key points in the Mind-Nature theories of the Sinicized Buddhist schools... The noumenon of Mind-Nature tends toward reification—treating it as a definite, real Existence—yet it differs fundamentally from Western philosophy, which regards substance as an independently existing, static 'Absolute.' Whether it is the 'One Thought-Mind' of the Tiantai School, the 'True Mind' of the Huayan School, or the ālayavijñāna of the Consciousness-Only School, all are dynamic, cultivatable, and realizable Noumena of Mind-Nature. Because these 'Noumena' are all grounded in the Mind-substance of sentient beings and aim at the cultivation goal of liberation and Buddhahood (i.e., the Nirvāṇa state), the vitality of life itself and the 'Processual' Nature of the path to liberation make the Ontology of Chinese Buddhism a philosophy of organismic Existence, life, and humanism." [9]

Another path that makes "not establishing words" possible is the "Prajñā-Emptiness View." Clearly, Chan (Zen) thought encompasses both the Consciousness-Only doctrine centered on the Mind as noumenon and the Prajñā doctrine of Emptiness.

The Diamond Sūtra (Chapter 21): "Subhūti, do not think that the Tathāgata conceives the idea, 'I will expound the Dharma.' Do not think so. Why? If someone says the Tathāgata expounds the Dharma, they slander the Buddha, failing to understand my teaching. Subhūti, in the Dharma expounded, there is no Dharma to expound—this is called 'Expounding the Dharma.'" [10]

When sentient beings hear the Buddha expound the Dharma, they assume the expounded Dharma is an actual Existence—this is tantamount to slandering the Buddha. The Dharma expounded by the Buddha is a provisional expedient established at the level of words for the purpose of liberating sentient beings: "The Buddha speaks of Prajñā, yet it is not Prajñā—this is called Prajñā." It is not the true Prajñā of reality. Sentient beings rely on the Prajñā of words as an entry point, but upon complete awakening, all names and characteristics are discarded. Only by breaking through sentient beings' attachment to the perceived characteristics of the Buddha's body and speech can one awaken to the realm of Prajñā-Emptiness. A similar idea of Prajñā-Emptiness can be found in The Vimalakīrti Sūtra (Chapter 3, "The Disciples"): "The Dharma is free from disputation, for it is ultimately Empty." Here, "Disputation" refers to meaningless speech contrary to truth, broadly encompassing all verbal discourse. Sengzhao comments: "The true realm is wordless; all speech is Empty play. Transcending the realm of words, it is ultimately Empty." (Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sūtra, Vol. 2) "Ultimately Empty" is one of the "Eighteen Emptinesses" described in The Great Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra—both conditioned and unconditioned Dharmas are Empty. "'Ultimately Empty' means using the Emptiness of the conditioned and the unconditioned to negate all Dharmas without residue—this is called 'Ultimately Empty.'" (The Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom, Vol. 31)

Huineng attained awakening upon hearing The Diamond Sūtra's line, "One should produce the Mind without abiding in anything." It can be said that Chan, building on the Mahāyāna doctrine of "Emptiness," uses the wisdom of Prajñā-Emptiness to sweep away external characteristics, revealing the true reality of the Mind-Nature Noumenon. This demonstrates the difference between Chan and the Prajñā doctrine of Emptiness: after negating both self and Dharmas, Chan posits an actual Mind-Nature Noumenon, whereas the Prajñā-Emptiness view is a functional construct. The subsequent state of this Mind-Nature Noumenon is a pure "Empty" realm. In contrast, traditional Prajñā-Emptiness negates both inner and outer phenomena, ultimately leaving even the conceptual reality of "Emptiness" unestablished.

Chen Jian summarized: The Prajna thought in Buddhism encompasses three aspects, namely illuminating Prajna, textual Prajna, and ultimate reality Prajna. Illuminating Prajna refers to perceiving all phenomena in the mundane world as "Empty"; textual Prajna means regarding all Buddhist scriptures and discourses that expound Buddhist principles as "Empty"; while ultimate reality Prajna entails viewing the so-called "Ultimate Reality" in Buddhism—which is "Emptiness" itself—as "Empty" (including even the Buddha as "Empty"). "Not Establishing Words" means not clinging to the "Words" of Buddhist scriptures and discourses. In this sense, "Not Establishing Words" is undoubtedly "Textual Prajna"—that is, using the Prajna View of Emptiness to contemplate and perceive Buddhist scriptures, regarding them as "Empty," thereby avoiding attachment to them. [11]

The Platform Sutra asks: "What is the meaning of 'Not Establishing'?" The master replied: "The Self-Nature is free from error, delusion, and confusion. With continuous Prajna contemplation, one constantly transcends Dharma appearances, attaining complete freedom and mastery. What is there to establish? The Self-Nature awakens by itself, realizing sudden enlightenment and sudden cultivation without gradual stages. Therefore, no Dharma is established." [2]

The "Self-Nature" is inherently a Pure Mind "Free from Error," "Delusion," and "Confusion." What practitioners need to do is simply apply the "Prajna contemplation" that perceives the external as "Empty" to all phenomena, seeking the Way with an Ordinary Mind, thereby attaining freedom without confining themselves to doctrinal norms. Through the immediate insight of Prajna's View of Emptiness in that very moment, the true form of the "Self-Nature" is uncovered, enabling one to break through gradual stages, achieving sudden cultivation and sudden enlightenment without the need to establish any Dharma.

"If one awakens to the Self-Nature, neither Bodhi nor Nirvana is established, nor is the knowledge of liberation. Only when nothing is obtainable can all Dharmas be established. This is true seeing of the Nature. If one understands this meaning, it is called the Buddha-body, also called Bodhi-Nirvana, the knowledge of liberation, the sixteen directions and lands, the sands of the Ganges, the three thousand great thousand worlds, and the twelve divisions of the canon. For those who see the Nature, establishing is acceptable, and not establishing is also acceptable. They come and go freely, unobstructed, acting as needed and responding as spoken, universally manifesting transformation bodies without departing from the Self-Nature. Thus, they attain the power of the divine play of Samadhi—this is called seeing the Nature." [2]

An enlightened person, one who sees the Nature, "Establishes No Dharma" through the "Prajna View of Emptiness." All Dharmas—including Bodhi, Nirvana, the knowledge of liberation, the sixteen directions and lands, the sands of the Ganges, the three thousand great thousand worlds, and the twelve divisions of the canon—may or may not be established. The Mind of "Self-Nature" is the Noumenon, while the Prajna View of Emptiness is the means to directly realize the "Self-Nature." Contemplating "Emptiness" dismantles conceptual distinctions, freeing one from attachment to establishing or not establishing, thereby enabling unimpeded freedom and spontaneous action. By using the "View of Emptiness" to remove barriers separating one from the Noumenal Nature of the Self-Mind, one achieves clear insight into the Nature, attaining immediate enlightenment.

4. "No Words" Provides Ideological Inspiration for the Sculptural Concepts of Dunhuang Grotto Art

Here, the question of how "not establishing words and letters" is possible has been clarified, namely by relying on two aspects: the ontological foundation of the "True Suchness Mind" and the contemplative method of "Prajñā Emptiness insight." Since "not establishing words and letters" is established, it logically provides theoretical possibility for the special status of the "Images" in Grotto art within Buddhism. At the same time, the establishment of the Mind's ontological foundation and the epistemological method of "Prajñā Emptiness Insight" also offer a theoretical explanation for the "Contemplating Emptiness to Perceive Images" in Dunhuang Grotto art, which will be discussed in detail in the second part. As mentioned earlier, textual and doctrinal discourse tends to cling to dualities, violating "Non-duality" and making it difficult to attain "True Suchness"; failing to understand the meaning of "Emptiness" means abandoning the wisdom of "Prajñā". This raises the question: Why did the creation of Buddhist Grotto art proliferate alongside the spread of Buddhism? Why was such artistic activity so flourishing in Chinese history?

From the perspective of Buddhist philosophy, a clue can be discerned from the above-mentioned Zen and Buddhist critiques of verbal discourse: although scriptures and discourse are important, within Zen itself, there was an intense debate between "not establishing words and letters" and "not abandoning words and letters." However, the limitations of discourse easily render "Expounding the Dharma" ineffective, instead trapping the "Dharma" in logical paradoxes that are difficult to reconcile. Rather than expounding or explaining the Dharma, thereby plunging discourse into irresolvable disputes, it is better to convey the Dharma subtly and wordlessly through the intuitive

form of art, where silence surpasses a thousand words. For meditators and devotees, becoming entangled in linguistic arguments exhausts the mind and body, leading to obsession and contradiction with the spirit of renunciation. It is far more straightforward to directly contemplate the "Mind" and "Emptiness" through personal realization. The "Images" of Grotto Art inspire sudden and profound awakening of the "Mind," Contemplating Emptiness to break attachments and reveal the pure Mind of "True Suchness."

Wittgenstein argued that "philosophy should draw limits to what can be thought, and thereby to what cannot be thought." "What can be thought at all can be thought clearly. What can be said can be said clearly." Philosophy should delineate "Reason" and "Thought," then further divide "Thought" into "what can be thought clearly" and "what cannot be thought clearly." "Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are the limits of logic." In Wittgenstein's view, language, logic, and the world are identical; thus, the limits of linguistic logic are the limits of the world. Reason has its boundaries, and what lies beyond the limits of linguistic logic is unspeakable. Therefore, "what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence." [12]

The realm of the "Unspeakable" includes metaphysics, ethics, the meaning of life, aesthetics, and faith, among others. This aligns remarkably with Buddhism's rejection of verbal discourse. Thus, analyzing Zen's "not establishing words and letters" cannot be limited to the practicality of religious propagation; even from a purely philosophical perspective, it holds significant reflective value. Dunhuang Grotto Art directly and indirectly encompasses the aforementioned categories of "metaphysics, ethics, the meaning of life, aesthetics, and faith," conveying them through "Wordless" expression. Since Dunhuang Grottoes are a silent, visual artistic field primarily expressed through sculpture and painting, they clearly transcend the linguistic form of philosophical expression. In Buddhist philosophy, Zen's "not establishing words and letters" is particularly well-known. Therefore, it is fitting to use this as a basis to explore the theoretical possibility of Dunhuang Art within Buddhist philosophy and to uncover its philosophical significance. The concept of "not establishing words and letters" precisely serves as the theoretical foundation for Dunhuang Grotto Art to transcend linguistic logic and reach the "Boundaries of the World," where the "Boundaries of the World" are the realm of the Buddhist path.

5. Conclusion

Through the above discussion, this study first delves into the Zen classics to explore the original meaning of Zen's "No Words", reconstructing the intellectual debates within Zen texts through a historical positivist approach. The second part of this paper employs a philosophical discourse system to achieve argumentative reconstruction, establishing the ontological form of "Mind as the Foundation" in Zen philosophy. It further demonstrates two possible paths for "No Words": the Yogācāra meaning of "Mind as the Fundamental Reality" and the "Prajñā Emptiness View" method of "Contemplating Emptiness." Finally, the study transcends traditional Buddhist doctrinal discourse by extracting the theory of "No Words" and applying it as a universal artistic principle, discussing its contemporary value for the "Philosophy of Image" in the sculptural thought of the Dunhuang Grottoes. The Dunhuang Grotto Art's concept of "Awakening through Contemplating Images" transcends the boundaries of linguistic logic, converging with the theoretical logic of "No Words".

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