

# Feasibility and Exception--The Grand Narrative Theory in the Myths of Buddhist Sculpture Art

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## Abstract:

This paper explores the grand narrative, especially in the context of Buddhist sculpture art. It portrays grand narratives as broad, non-falsifiable systems stemming from a collective story, often focusing on universality and macro theories. The paper also highlights the link between grand narratives and myth. The author examines how grand narrative theory applies to Buddhist art, evident in visual forms like Buddha statues, which function as both religious symbols and narrative components. This article mainly consists of two lines of analysis. One line examines the representation of grandeur and narrative in Buddhist sculptures, while the other line examines the changes in the grand narrative of Buddhist sculptures. The former involves the relationship between images and texts, while the latter involves the feasibility of the end of grand narrative as proposed by Jean-François Lyotard's theory of grand narrative.

**Keywords:** grand narrative; Buddha statue art; secularisation; collectivity.

## 1. Introduction

Myth comes from the Greek Muthos, meaning a kind of unfalsifiable narrative system [1]. Alan Dundis once said that myth is sacred, and all forms of religion are combined with myth somehow. The equivalent Chinese is “神话”, literally meaning the god's word or divine word. Myth, as it is called in academia, always have three conditions: (1) a single narrative of the original years (2) owning an ability to expand the range of believers (3) usually created for ancient ethnic groups collectively. “In *The World's Religions*, Ninian Smart describes “narrative” and “mythologies” as two out of the seven dimensions of religion. Throughout many of the world's religious belief systems, myth forms the basis of their belief concepts and doctrines. The same is true of Buddhism [2].”

Grand narrative, also known as “meta-narrative, means a “complete narrative”[3], an all-encompassing narrative. As a kind of unfalsifiable narrative system too, the Grand Narrative is a broad concept. Lyotard created the grand narrative to clarify the end of the grand narrative in the post-modernity context [4]. He called such a grand narrative a modernity myth. Whether the grand narrative will enter its end is still controversial. However, the term itself has been widely used in different fields and different contexts.

There are two words linked with the grand narrative concept. One is the “fundamentality”. The other is the “col-

lectivity”. The former meaning is used as another word for mainstream schools of philosophy in a period of time, like the enlightenment narration and speculative narration in the post-modern era, for mainstream theory in art history critique, like Danto once said the love of beauty [5-7] (Because of this Danto thinks the end of beauty admiration is the end of art history critique system, for the basic principles in the law in jurisprudence study [8]. These reflect the sense of “fundamentality”. In other words, the fundamental narrative can be called “grand”.

The latter is the collectivity. In documentaries, company culture studies, literature critique etc, the Grand narrative is nearer to the opposite of the individual narrative. Literally or figuratively, it is not only about the narrative perspective of the characters in the content but also the creator outside the content (the designer and the watcher). [9-11].

As “Grand narratives often emphasise totality, macro theory, universality, and are opposed to individuality, deconstruction, and difference”[12], the former refers to its “macro theory,” and the latter refers to its “totality.” It echoes the conditions of (ancient) myth. The feature of “fundamental” is connected to “original” in the first condition. And the other is connected to “created collectively” in the third condition. Religious artworks are imitations of religious myths [6], therefore artworks have narrative qualities. Artworks that record myths are collective creations of groups, and at the same time, artworks them-

selves possess “Voice (Klang)” [13]. Such a Voice is also narrating. The content it weaves is also grand, specifically on the sublime theme, the standout hero, the proportion of the group and the surroundings which contain the hero, and the transcendence and connectivity of the field.

In the field of religion, the sense of fundamentality is about the myth of cosmology, which has been studied by a lot of scholars, But the sense of collectivity is the myth of the hero, the way how the hero created and connected to the other in a group. Since the beginning of its establishment, religions have chosen artistic images as the second medium of narrative in addition to text. Visual art with a hero like Buddha or Bodhisattva is a narrative story, a myth, a grand narrative on the collective level.

## 2. Research methods

Through the methods of literature review and citation (philology) and comparative commentary (Hermeneutics), this paper adopts the qualitative analysis of an inter-discipline perspective on the feasibility and exception of grand narrative theory.

## 3. The origin of the grand narrative-A Genealogy of Postmodern Individual Narratives

### 3.1 Shared Words

Collective creation necessitates a shared story that holds common meaning for a group. Myths originate from this belief in a collective narrative. Yuval Harari argues that belief in shared stories forms the initial imaginary communities of humans, leading to settlements and ethnic groups that protect individuals. [14] This idea is echoed in the biblical phrase, “In the beginning was the Word...” (John 1:1) [15], highlighting the deep connection between narrative and myth in religion. In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera illustrates how the meaning of words evolves with time and differs between individuals. He compares relationships between people to their unique “corpora.” [16] Similarly, early communities developed shared narratives as their collective experiences unified, turning words into sacred stories that shaped their beliefs. Oral texts were transcribed into manuscripts to meet recitation needs, such as during the Panathenaic Festival [17]. These texts gained authority through repeated recitations, becoming formalized and standardized over time. People who speak the same language believe in the same stories, reinforcing them until they become authoritative.

### 3.2 Secular Power

Marx believed that in every stage of social development, the dominant ideology reflects the will of the ruling class

[18]. When applied to Indian Buddhism, the concept of samsara and the view of suffering in Buddhism created an opportunity for stability in the newly established secular regime. The grand narratives found in Buddhist texts are adaptable, allowing for a close integration of kingship and Buddhism while conferring legitimacy upon them. This was evident in figures such as Ashoka, an Indian king in the early period of Buddhism, as well as Wu Zhao, a Chinese empress in the mid-period.

### 3.3 Word is Power

Ethics scholar Liu Xiaofeng comments on the phrase “In the beginning was the Word,” arguing that the ability to weave verbal texture is linked to the power of the subject to depict the other. That is the speech power of Hercules as a male representative (the side that holds the power of discourse) over the female body led by Arete (Virtue) and Kakhia (Vice) (the side who cannot speak and describe themselves). He used ancient myths as a metaphor for the modern human body in the context of modernity [19]. In *The Order of Discourse* [20], Foucault endowed discourse with intersubjectivity, arguing that it was a whole system of discourse that became powerful and dominated the objects of discourse. Foucault emphasised the constraints of language on people, and only by following the inherent laws of the language system could one be granted the legitimacy of expression. There is no true history; only the fabricated “historical truth” created by the repeated discourse of words [21]. Following Foucault’s view, the “mythical history” of Indian epics was also due to the power of discourse [22].

### 3.4 Buddhism myth & grand narrative

Combining the views above, it can be concluded that belief in the story gives the speaker worldly power, and the powerful person owns the ability to speak continuously. The repeated utterances of mythological stories in the same pattern build up the spiritual bond characterized by faith. It is the continuous weaving of the linguistic fabric that eventually forms a broader narrative, thus emerging and sustaining religion. Norbu Wangdan believes that Buddhist narratives have evolved from monolithic oral traditions into diverse cross-media narratives throughout history, thereby acquiring the capacity to interpret grand narratives from various fields [22]. Grand narratives originate from folk oral myths such as the Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, and the Tibetan epic Gesar, which were refined through continuous verbal weaving to become literary works (the Indian epic is estimated to have been written around BC500, while the Tibetan epic is estimated to have been written around). This is related to their becoming subservient to religion. In the process of

textual interpretation, the metaphorical representation of the protagonist tends to become more unified, “constantly deifying, sanctifying, and religionizing itself, becoming a transcendent god.[18]” Buddhism has combined with folk grand narratives in its development and produced Buddhist art grand narratives. Such a combination can be confirmed in the archaeological sites of the original Buddhism in ancient India in the next section.

### **4. The origin of Buddhist statue art with his surroundings:**

#### **4.1 Sanchi Pagoda & Barhut Stupa: The Blank of Buddha figure**

The mainstream of Buddhism in its early days (from c.588 BC to the 1st century BC) was Hinayana (Hinayana means Lesser Vehicle, nowadays some temples claim Hinayana is not equal to Theravada, the latter also includes some Mahayana sect.), which focused on the practice of individuals within the sangha. According to Buddhist mythology, it is after the Buddha left for heaven to preach to his Mum that the first Buddha statue was moulded out of a secular king’s yearning for him. So, the original statues are imitative of his mortal looks. If we adopt a Modern Western positivist historical view, like Gu Jiegang’s Gu Shi Bian (School of Historical Criticism) and Miyajima Haruaki’s method of seeking verification through explicit dating, there is no first-hand evidence proving that Buddha statues existed before the Kushan dynasty. The remains of the Sanchi Pagoda (dating to the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C.) show a period without Buddha statues, but symbolic objects replaced them, maintaining a narrative quality. The Barhut stupa frieze (3rd BCE) features reliefs, including carvings of the Sakyamuni Buddha Bunsen story [23,24].

#### **4.2 Early grand narrative in this field**

Moreover, these figurative engravings of Barhut stupa long predate the extant texts of the Jataka (another word of Bunsen, Sanskrit for “Birth-Related” or “Birth Stories”, a fable that records the Buddha’s heroization trajectory before his enlightenment) [25]. The reliefs of the lintel of the Barhout Tower contain as many as 32 recognisable Jataka stories in inscriptions, as well as several unidentified Jataka stories. In a scenario, on the left and right sides of the rank are the Brahma (a Hindu god, referred to as “the Creator” within the Trimurti, the trinity of supreme divinity that includes Vishnu and Shiva.) and Śakra (the ruler of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven according to Buddhist cosmology.) who accompany the Buddha, while the rest are the gods and believers who put their hands together to worship the Buddha[2]. The Buddha in this stone carving works crosses the human and divine realms, and expands

the object of Buddha’s preaching to the three realms of heaven, which reflects the universal value of Buddhism to save all living beings, and strongly reflects the divine nature of narrative.

#### **4.3 The reason for the combination of Buddha & grand narrative**

The stories contained in this archaeological evidence lack luxurious artistic expression, reflecting an antique beauty. This narrative may be because the “Impermanent” and “Quietus” in Hinayana Buddha’s meaning limit the development of idol worship, At the same time, because of its folk origin, it has not yet got rid of the secular characteristics, and the content of folk activities such as “playing on a swing” and so on. If it is included in Buddha art in a broad sense, it can be considered that the content level has the characteristics of the grand narrative. In the first century AD, Mahayana Buddhism emerged within Buddhism with the highest ideal of saving sentient beings, and the idea of Mahayana deifying and beautifying Buddha became popular [26]. The origin of the Buddha figure is controversial. However, “observation and meditation” became a key religious practice for Buddhists, where observing the Buddha was a compulsory part of their rituals, gradually strengthening the sense of ritual in Buddhism [26].

After the Kushan dynasty (c.1 century) was founded, Buddha statues appeared in Gandhara for the first time [26]. Why did the Buddha statue appear after the no-Buddha era? In Xu Jing’s dissertation, Mahayana Buddhism is flourishing here as never before. The Mahayana fully worshipped the Buddha as the supernatural God and the Buddhists have developed a strong desire for the image of the Buddha, and the followers can no longer satisfy themselves by merely replacing the image of the Buddha with symbolic symbols. The ideas and concepts of Mahayana Buddhism were exactly in line with the Hellenistic culture “God and man of the same sex and form” of Gandhara, which was the first to carve Hellenistic images of Buddhas, forming Gandhara style Buddha art [27].

Peng Rong points out that “in the early process of the spread of Buddhism, in order to make Buddhism accepted by more people and win more followers, Buddhism must seek the combination with popular secular art and seek the development path of popularization, and Buddhist art is the product of popularization of Buddhism “[28]. Cai Feng believes that the stories of Buddhas expressed in Gandhara Buddhist sculptures can be divided into “historicized” Buddhist stories, “secularized” Buddhist stories and “mythized” Buddhist stories. The first two tend to shape the Buddha’s ‘humanity’, and the second tends to emphasise the Buddha’s “divinity”. ... The secularisation

of Gandhara Buddha sculpture is manifested in the use of folk stories to show the secularisation of Buddha's life story on the one hand, and the use of secular images to contrast the sanctity of Buddha's life [29].

Some scholars have a conception that this is a spontaneous action taken by lay Buddhists with a strong flavour of polytheism, which integrates the image of Buddha with the long-circulated folk epics or myths, making Buddha a key deity as a pivot to maintain and strengthen the grand narrative of collective unity. As early as 1884, Jacobi said "I believe that this worship had nothing to do with original Buddhism or Jainism, that it did not originate with the monks, but with the lay community, when the people in general felt the want of a higher cult than that of their rude deities and demons, when the religious development of India found in Bhakti the supreme means of salvation." (See Jacobi, *Gaina Sūtras*, in *S. B. E.*, XXII, 1884, p. xxi.) Although the cause of its emergence is controversial. The combination of religion and folk myths or epics is not uncommon. Even sometimes the connection in the narrations between the new religion and the old still exists, because the latter dominated a position in folklore. The integration of Buddhism is after that of Brahmanism. In this textual narrative realm, the unnamed heroes or original heroes (such as Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the son of King Sudhodana, who is listed alongside Brahmanic deities, or the unnamed Tibetan commoner Gesar, who is seen as the incarnation of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, and Indra by different narrators. the chief deity of Hinduism) are religionised and sanctified, gradually erasing the secular nature of the original narrative.

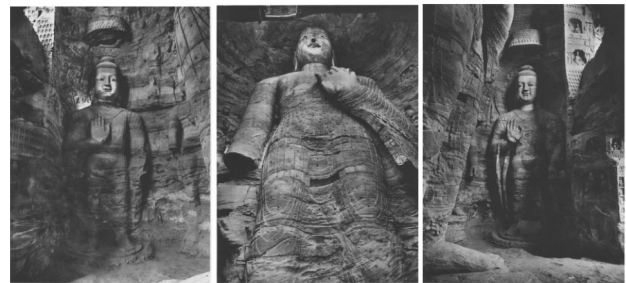
## 5. Crisis and chance –exile of motherland; revival in exotic region

In the late development of Indian Buddhism, around the 5th century AD, it faced its first existential crisis due to foreign invasions and competition from indigenous religions, as well as internal divisions. Eminent monks began spreading Buddhism and created a shared corpus between Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan languages through translation, aiding the grand narrative's revival in non-native languages. Sanskrit, the original language of Buddhist scriptures, also spread to China.

This narrative continued from India to China, where it influenced Buddhist sculpture and iconography for centuries. Even after Buddhism's decline in India, Chinese Buddhist grottoes were carved from the 3rd to the 16th century, reflecting the enduring appeal of Buddhism's

grand narrative across time and space. We can see a hint of localization, the same reason as before to maintain the grand narrative's vatility.

The five Tanyao caves of the Yungang Grottoes in Datong, Shanxi, China, carved during the Northern Wei Dynasty (around 398-525 AD), feature large statues of Sakyamuni Buddha. These statues reflect a transition in grand narratives where the Five Emperors, previously worshipped by the Northern Wei government, were replaced by the Five Buddhas [30]. This transition represents a shift from secular imperial worship to Buddhist devotion. Notably, a large standing Buddha in Cave 18, adorned in a robe with a thousand-Buddha motif, symbolizes the integration of Buddhist and celestial deities and aligns with royal authority (See Fig. 1). The gestures of this Buddha, are like those of smaller Buddhas beside it, and its robe style, which blends Gandhara and Han influences, are linked to Buddhist stories and Northern Wei myths, though detailed narrative content is currently lacking [30].



**Figure 1. Cave 18, Main Standing and Attendant Buddhas(Shoot by Seiichi Mizuno & Toshio Nagahiro).**

Wu Zhao promoted Buddhism and funded the Longmen Grottoes. These grottoes, spanning from the Northern Wei period to the Qing Dynasty, feature statues with 30% from the Northern Wei, 60% from the Tang Dynasty, and 10% from other periods. The largest Buddha statue among the groups, Vairocana, built around 672-675 AD in Henan, China, is said to be modelled after her appearance. So, it is the power of the secular emperor promoted the development of Buddha art, as well as Buddhism itself. According to UNESCO, Longmen grottoes "contain the largest and most impressive collection of Chinese art of the late Northern Wei and Tang Dynasties (316-907). These works, entirely devoted to the Buddhist religion, represent the high point of Chinese stone carving." [31]. If you visit the site, there is not a single Buddha but a group of Buddhas living in numerous scattering caves and niches on

the cliff. If Buddha could speak, they could speak one to another, and all they weaved is a fascinating grand narrative.



**Figure 2. Rushana Buddha in Kondō (Golden Hall) with the intricate Halo and Attendants (be courtesy of Tōshōdai-ji) [left]; The Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara Statues in the Sanjūsangen-dō Hall (be courtesy of Myōhō-in temple) [right].**

Toshio Nagahiro noted that colossal statues embody not only individual figures but also the essence of entire ethnic groups, societies, and eras. The grandeur of such statues enhances their superhuman qualities, making them powerful symbols of their time [32]. A colossal Buddha, for instance, both reflects and narrates the spirit of its era. It can symbolize an entire period, with successive Buddhas contributing to a continuous historical narrative. Similarly, Japanese Buddhist statues, influenced by Tang Dynasty styles, embody this grand narrative. The Vairocana Buddha at Tōshōdai-ji (See Fig. 2), adorned with tiny attendant Buddhas, creates a balance between the singular and the many. The attendants and viewers highlight the Buddha as the central figure while also being protected by him, showcasing a dual relationship. During prayers, they act as both listeners and speakers, sharing a collective spiritual experience. Scholars note that it, standing 304.5 cm tall with 862 small Buddha figures on its halo, reflects the significance of wooden materials in Buddhist art, with about 80% of such statues made of wood [33]. Yasumi Miyazawa of Japan highlighted in an NHK interview that Japan’s veneration of sacred trees influenced the creation of Buddhist statues, merging indigenous Shinto animism with Buddhism [33]. In the Sanjūsangen-dō Hall, the Kannon (Avalokitesvara) statues, which feature Gandhara-style moustaches and small Buddhas on their heads, form a group of 1001 statues (See Fig.2). Their arrangement, reminiscent of terracotta warriors, evokes a Bushido spirit and reflects the influence of Kiyoshimori Hira (1118-1181), the first Japanese military dictator. In folklore or folklore studies, repetition has been implicitly expressed in collectivity, stability and inheritance. Increasingly, special consideration is being given. As Bronner put it, “Folklore is the repetition and variation of

traditional knowledge and behaviour. What is generally called practice is a popular and symbolic term for a certain stylized repetitive behaviour “[34]. The repetition of the statue reinforces the repetition of the narrative. Reminiscent of the different stories of different incarnations of Guanyin in mythology, this narrative also strengthens the image of Kannon. Similar gestures, such as those of a Buddha statue in a grotto, reinforce the consistency of style and the stability of the statue, as well as a fundamental tenet of Buddhism that is widely discussed in iconography - the metaphor of the cosmology-the so-called “fundamentality” in the introduction. In the spreading of the grand narrative, the hero is commonly combined with the different regional features and weaves out the collective story as well as connecting to his surroundings, the group of Buddhas and the group of people.

## 6. The second Crisis—disconnection with the surroundings:

The Four Buddhist Persecutions in China are called “The Disasters of Three Wu and One Zong”. After the Tang Dynasty (AC.618-AC.907), with the decline of social politics and economy, the historical process of China entered the late feudal society. Buddhism gradually declined under the impact of the political movement, and the art of Buddha statues also turned from prosperity to decline. In fact, since the middle of the Tang Dynasty, the art of Buddha statues has been faced with this predicament. Ge Zhaoguang, a scholar of Buddhist history, proclaims that the emergence of Zen Buddhism led to the division of Buddhism, and there were dangerous factors that led to the dissolution of Buddhism [35]. Sceptical of the shared fable, some believers moved away from the original single narrative model and advocated enlightenment and introspection, that the mind is the Buddha, rather than practising according to the teachings of the scriptures. The *Platform Sutra* records Sichuan monk Fang bian “shaped the true form” and “fully expressed its subtleties” in his sculptural works for Huineng. However, Huineng replied, “You only understand the external form, not the Buddha-nature. [36].”It shows he believed that sculptures could not truly express the Dharma-body, Dharma-nature, Buddha-nature, or the true face of a person [37]. This means that the audience of the grand narrative in Buddha art gradually shifted their eyes to other places, and some of the audience disputed over worshipping the Buddha statue as a religious meditation way and returned to the concept of non-idol worship at the beginning of Buddhism, and pursued their inner stability. This also means that the grand narrative centred on mythology and classics in the art of Buddha statues has gradually entered an existential crisis [35].

Although small grottoes were still carved during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), this marked the end of such activities [27]. The grand narrative created by vivid group images could no longer be sustained. After the founding of the Republic, ideological shifts led the Chinese government to reclaim much temple land, forcing many monks and nuns to return to secular life. The influx of Western learning and cultural clashes further accelerated Buddhism's decline.

Wars and calamities left China without the protective environments of traditional sites like grottoes and pagodas, diminishing the ability to regenerate or expand these sites. In modern sculptures, Buddha images have become more alienated and individualized, losing their spiritual integration and narrative context. The grand narrative woven through centuries seemed to halt, giving way to secularized alienation and loosened spiritual bonds. As Heidegger said, "Language is the house of being." Buddhist sculptures, once living in a grand narrative built with sacred language, have now often become small, portable crafts for tourists or standardized, industrialized figures like the Eighteen Arhats or Maitreya Buddha. These modern statues, with their utilitarian purpose and historical disconnection, have largely lost their "grandness" and existential significance.

The characteristics of individual Buddha statues in Ming and Qing Dynasties are discussed in detail in Huang Chunhe's *The Art of Buddhist Statues*: "The secular society of Ming and Qing Dynasties constantly misinterpreted and changed the original spirit of Buddhism due to different interests, which made Buddhism further secularized on the basis of Song and Yuan Dynasties. This development of Buddhism had a direct impact on Buddhist image art. [38]". Xu Jing's study of Buddhist image art reveals that during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Buddhist art became more secular. Buddha statues from this time had full bodies, stiff postures, wide flat faces, and expressions like secular figures. They were richly decorated but lacked the sacred power of earlier statues, reflecting a secular focus on wealth. The statues followed strict standards for posture, mounts, mudras (hand gestures), decorations, and facial expressions, leading to a formulaic and unvarying style. Despite differences in hand gestures and contours, the unique artistic qualities of the Tang and Song periods were lost, and even large groups like the Five Hundred Arhats were just repetitive models without vitality [27].

But the secular power still prolongs such grand narratives in Buddha statue art. For example, the statue created by Emperor Wanli for his mother, Empress Dowager Ci Sheng, is divided into six layers, with the three-layer pedestal featuring the Pilu statue, whose base is covered with thousands of small Buddhas. In Buddhist sutras, each

Buddha represents a small world that merges into a larger world, and this depiction reflects the grand narrative of the remnants of the feudal dynasty. However, it also reveals the tendencies of craftsmanship. Despite its imperial atmosphere (endowed with secular royal power), it is not highly integrated with its surroundings or the larger natural environment. Furthermore, for the audience, it lacks the impact and public nature of Tang Dynasty statues; it is a single piece rather than one of many that form a larger whole.

In this regard, Xu Jing pointed out that during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the migration of Buddhist religious sites from caves to temples, and from rural areas to cities, led to a separation of Buddhist image art from the cave temples, further intensifying the secularization of Buddhism. Although the folk statues of that time were made by different artists and had unique features, they all shared a plain and crude overall style. The statues were created in various materials, including bamboo, wood, stone, copper, and ceramics. The focus on elaborate and luxurious forms often overshadowed the spiritual essence, making the statues resemble crafts more than true works of art [27]. Thus, the collective narrative constructed by royal power gradually shifted to individual interpretations of Buddhism by the common people. Inevitably, the shared vocabulary began to lose meaning, resulting in textual ambiguities. The common spiritual essence diminished, secularization eroded the sense of the sublime, and Buddhist image art gradually declined. Although mudras (hand gestures) still reflect the cosmology, their grandeur from a collective perspective is somewhat diminished.

In the postmodern era, Buddhist sculpture has increasingly been commodified, leading to a profound impact on its grand narrative. The creation of large-scale statues and group sculptures continues to reflect grand characteristics, symbolizing the enduring legacy of Buddhist art. However, this transformation has led to a significant shift: while Buddhism seems to be experiencing a revival in Southeast Asia, where countries like Thailand and Malaysia have formally endorsed it as a national religion, the practice has become intertwined with commercial interests. This shift reflects the growing influence of tourism and commerce on Buddhist art, which has affected its purity and spiritual essence.

Sociological studies, such as those conducted by Ge Yumei, reveal that Buddhism has become more tangible in recent times. Instead of being an abstract spiritual concept, it now manifests in concrete forms like Buddha statues, temple halls, relic boxes, and expenditures related to rituals and building maintenance [39]. This shift indicates a move towards a more materialistic view of Buddhism, where the focus has shifted to physical artefacts and the

economic aspects of maintaining religious institutions. Ge Yumei's research highlights a dual perspective: while secularism and sanctity can coexist, there is a noticeable tension between the spiritual aspirations of the monastic community and the material needs of the secular world [39]. This tension has contributed to a weakening of the sacredness traditionally associated with Buddhism.

The combination of these two views highlights Buddhism's increasing secularization. Buddha statues have shifted from grand ritualistic narratives to subtle cultural and creative expressions. While debates continue whether secularism undermines the sublime or religion itself, it's widely accepted that cultural creation is now seen more as craft than art. Buddha art driven by cultural creation often leans towards commercialization, which contrasts with religious ideals. In modern China, the grand narratives of Buddhism are faintly visible in the Nanshan Statue of Guanyin in Sanya and the Brass Statue of Nanhai Guanyin in Putuo Mountain. However, these constructions are mainly seen as part of folk history and tourism promotion, rather than sincere national prayers or daily religious practices. Buddhist thought is no longer the official ideology. Media reports reveal public dissatisfaction with entrance fees and additional charges for worship at scenic spots [40]. The doctrine of universal salvation in Mahayana Buddhism has been restricted by commercial interests, weakening the connection between Buddha images and their sacred significance. This commercialization has led to a subtle yet significant erosion of traditional holiness, as expressed by some viewers and reflected in mass media. The crucial question is whether such artwork can truly reflect authenticity in the postmodern era. Buddha sculptures might resemble a "map," as Baudrillard suggests, where the map shapes reality by detailing and circumscribing the representation, while the actual reality fades from use [41]. Thus, is this handicraft merely a commercial replica of the past rather than an authentic depiction of the present?

## 7. Conclusion

In the post-modern era, whether Buddha statues are approaching the end of the grand narrative is a topic worth exploring. The history of Buddhist sculpture indicates that the grand narrative is closely related to Buddhist Buddha statues, reflected in their sublime themes, mythic content, grand scale, integrity of figures, narrative stability, and wide audience. However, restrictions on Buddha statues, a decrease in devotees, rigid understanding, and the intersection of Buddhism with power have weakened the statues' integrity and narrative stability. While the combination of Buddhist art and secular life initially promoted Buddhism, it later deconstructed the sublime and diluted

the myth, contributing to the decline of the grand narrative. These factors played a significant role in the crisis of the grand narrative. Recent studies, such as those on the modern Chinese temple economy, show that Buddhism has become more concrete, manifesting in tangible forms like statues, temple facilities, and maintenance expenses. With exception of tourism, Thailand presents a possible way to get rid of commercialization, with efforts like depicting Buddha images with gold thread on a mountain to make every visitor worship it without tickets and trying to move and reconstruct the Afghan Buddha statue in Thailand after the Taliban destroyed it. Some Chinese social groups also do things like that as volunteers. This is a Buddhist selfless act. Strengthening collective narratives globally might help Buddhism overcome the crisis and create more and larger sculptural groups.

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