

Taoist Patterns in Traditional Chinese Residential Architecture

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As China's indigenous religion, Taoism's core tenets of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity and Tao Emulates Nature, alongside its immortal worship system, have profoundly shaped the design and decorative art of traditional vernacular dwellings. Traditional residences stand as tangible carriers of Chinese traditional culture; their spatial layouts, structural configurations and ornamental motifs all embody people's spiritual pursuits and cultural beliefs. Rooted deeply in Chinese civilization, Taoism evolved into a complete religious and symbolic system following its formal establishment in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD). Imbued with auspicious connotations and cultural symbolism, Taoist decorative patterns are widely applied to wood, stone and brick carvings, window latticework, roof ridge ornaments, screen walls and other architectural components of folk houses, serving as a vital bridge connecting mundane life and religious faith.

Existing academic studies on Taoist architecture predominantly focus on Taoist temples and monasteries, while systematic research into Taoist decorative patterns embedded in civilian residences remains insufficient. From an academic perspective, this paper analyzes the application characteristics of Taoist motifs in traditional dwellings and traces the historical evolution of Taoism. It aims to broaden the research scope of traditional architectural decorative culture and provide theoretical support for the inheritance and innovative revitalization of traditional architectural heritage.

Taoism was not founded by a single figure at a fixed time, but gradually took shape through the long-term fusion of diverse cultural traditions. Its evolution can be divided into three phases: ideological germination, esoteric practice accumulation, and formal religious establishment.

The ideological origins of Taoism stretch back to the Pre-Qin Period (c. 21st century BC – 221 BC), deriving from ancient nature worship, spiritual sacrifice and shamanic traditions. By offering sacrifices to deities of heaven, earth, the sun, the moon, mountains and rivers, ancient ancestors established the primitive belief in **the Correspondence Between Heaven and Humanity**. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770–221 BC), Laozi (Li Er) authored *Tao Te Ching*, advancing the philosophical propositions that **Tao engenders all things** and **Tao emulates nature**. Zhuangzi (Zhuang Zhou) compiled *Nanhua Jing*, advocating

spiritual transcendence and the equality of all existence, which laid the theoretical cornerstone of Taoist thought.

In the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BC – 220 AD), Taoism entered a phase of accumulating immortal arts and alchemical practices. The pursuit of immortality and elixir refinement prevailed during this era. Both Emperor Qin Shi Huang (259–210 BC) and Emperor Wu of Han (156–87 BC) devoted themselves to seeking immortals and refining elixirs for longevity. Meanwhile, Huang-Lao thought, which integrated Taoist philosophy with health-preserving doctrines, gained widespread popularity, laying practical and theoretical groundwork for the eventual formation of Taoism.

Taoism was formally institutionalized in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD). During the reign of Emperor Shun (126–144 AD), Zhang Ling (Zhang Daoling, 34–156 AD) traveled to Sichuan and founded the Five Pecks of Rice Sect (Tianshi Dao) at Heming Mountain. Honoring Laozi as the supreme patriarch and adopting *Tao Te Ching* as its core scripture, he established formal religious institutions, marking the official birth of organized Taoism. Under Emperor Ling of the Eastern Han Dynasty (168–189 AD), Zhang Jiao (?–184 AD) established the Taiping Sect, centered on *Taiping Jing*. Proclaiming the rallying cry “*The Azure Heaven shall perish; the Yellow Heaven shall reign*”, he launched the Yellow Turban Uprising, establishing the Taiping Sect as a major early Taoist school.

Taoism venerates **Tao** as the supreme cosmic principle, with its belief system anchored in three core dimensions: the primacy of Tao, immortal veneration, and the pursuit of longevity. As the ultimate essence of the universe, Tao is regarded as the origin and inherent law of all creation — formless and intangible, yet nurturing every living being. Taoism advocates harmony between humanity and the natural world by adhering to the way of Tao. Immortal worship humanizes the abstract Tao into a structured pantheon, including the Three Pure Ones (Yuanshi Tianzun, Lingbao Tianzun, Daode Tianzun), the Four Heavenly Sovereigns, the Eight Immortals, and the Three Stars of Fortune, Prosperity and Longevity. Taoist doctrine holds that mortals can achieve immortality through spiritual cultivation and transcend the cycle of life and death. The quest for longevity represents Taoism’s ultimate spiritual goal, encouraging practitioners to attain eternal life and spiritual liberation through self-discipline, elixir refinement, physical cultivation and virtuous deeds.

After its formation in the Eastern Han Dynasty, Taoism permeated all social strata through four developmental pathways: grassroots folk dissemination, integration with elite ruling circles, sectarian division, and cross-cultural fusion. At the grassroots level, early sects such as the Taiping Sect and Five Pecks of Rice Sect gained popular followings by using talisman water to heal the sick and conducting rituals to invoke blessings and ward off disasters, becoming a spiritual pillar for ordinary people.

During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties (220–589 AD), eminent Taoist masters including Ge Hong (283–343 AD), Kou Qianzhi (365–448 AD) and Lu Xiuqing (406–477 AD) reformed Taoist doctrines, standardized religious rituals and canons, and aligned Taoism with imperial interests. This enabled Taoism to gain patronage from nobles and scholar-officials, ascending into upper-class society.

The Jin and Yuan dynasties (1115–1368 AD) witnessed major sectarian division within Taoism. Wang Chongyang (1112–1170 AD) founded the Quanzhen Sect, which advocated the syncretism of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, emphasizing ascetic discipline and internal alchemy. The Orthodox Sect (derived from the original Tianshi Dao) prevailed in southern China, focusing on talismanic rituals and sacrificial ceremonies. Thereafter, Taoism solidified into two dominant schools — the Orthodox Sect and the Quanzhen Sect — spreading across northern and southern China respectively. Furthermore, Taoism continually intermingled with Confucian and Buddhist traditions. Its immortal legends and auspicious motifs spread via literature, painting, architecture and folk customs, embedding themselves deeply in residential design, festive traditions and daily decorative arts.

Taoism reached its golden age in the Tang and Song dynasties (Tang: 618–907 AD; Song: 960–1279 AD), with the Tang Dynasty marking its peak of imperial endorsement. The imperial Li clan of the Tang honored Laozi (Li Er) as their ancestral sage, conferring upon him the title of Supreme Mysterious Primordial Emperor and elevating Taoism to the status of a state religion. Emperors Taizong (598–649 AD) and Xuanzong (685–762 AD) vigorously promoted Taoism by constructing grand temple complexes, ordaining Taoist priests, and compiling the authoritative *Taoist Canon*. As a religion sanctioned by the ruling elite, Taoism exerted comprehensive influence over politics, culture and architectural design.

The Song imperial court continued the tradition of imperial Taoist patronage. Emperors Zhenzong (968–1022 AD) and Huizong (1082–1135 AD) were devout Taoists, commissioning elaborate Taoist palaces and advancing the secularization of Taoist culture. Taoist decorative motifs became deeply intertwined with folk customs and were widely adopted in residential ornamentation.

From the Yuan through the Ming and Qing dynasties, Taoism gradually declined from its medieval zenith. In the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368 AD), it maintained steady development divided between the Orthodox and Quanzhen sects. The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 AD) imperial court adopted a dual policy of utilizing and restricting Taoism. In the Qing Dynasty (1636–1912 AD), rulers favored Tibetan Buddhism, leading to the gradual decline of institutional Taoism. Even so, its decorative motif heritage persisted and continued to be passed down in folk residential architecture.

As visual emblems of Taoist culture, Taoist patterns are extensively deployed in traditional residential buildings, falling into three major application categories: decorative structural components, spatial layout symbolism, and sacrificial installations. Common themes include immortal figures, auspicious mythical beasts, ritual implements, and symbolic inscriptions bearing propitious meanings. Merging practical architectural function with profound spiritual connotations, these motifs constitute an indispensable element of residential decoration while encapsulating core Taoist philosophies and folk spiritual aspirations — standing as tangible evidence of the harmonious coexistence between Taoist culture and everyday secular life.

I. Taoist Figurative Patterns

Ancient communities revered Laozi, the founder of Taoism, as the patriarch of the religion, with *Tao Te Ching* regarded as its foundational scripture. The essence of early Taoist philosophy laid crucial ideological groundwork for the establishment of Taoism. Traditional residential decorative art assimilates key Taoist concepts such as tranquil inaction, physical and spiritual self-cultivation, and wellness preservation. Motifs inspired by these doctrines are deliberately placed in various corners and special spaces within dwellings. They embody people's prayers for prosperous livelihoods, familial harmony, career success and academic achievement, while also providing spiritual solace through warding off evil and averting misfortune.

1. Pangu Pattern

Also known as Yuanshi Tianzun, Pangu is honored by numerous titles: Yuqing Yuanshi Tianzun, Grand Lord Pangu, Supreme Heavenly Lord of Jade Capital, Supreme Taoist Honored One, Primordial Heavenly Lord and Purple Sovereign. Universally recognized as the progenitor of Taoism and the creator of heaven and earth, Pangu ranks foremost among the Three Pure Ones, Taoism's highest divine trinity. *Comprehensive Records of Immortals Through Dynasties* describes him as **the Ancestor presiding over the Heavenly Realm**, the ruler of all creation.

Classic artistic depictions feature Pangu holding the sun and moon aloft, splitting heaven and earth with a giant axe, alongside scenes of celestial roaming, imperial inspection and goddesses descending to the mortal realm. This pattern symbolizes pioneering courage and trailblazing spirit.

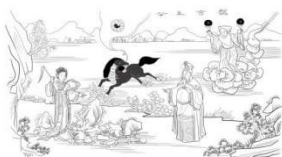


Fig.1 Qing-dynasty painted ornamentation: Pangu and Nüwa creating heaven and earth amid the cosmos.

2. Pattern of the Three Pure Ones

This motif is primarily adorned on the main ancestral screen and shrine altars of traditional residences. The Three Pure Ones — Yuanshi Tianzun, Lingbao Tianzun and Daode Tianzun — are revered as the founding deities of Taoism, credited with creating the universe, saving mortal souls through cosmic kalpas, and disseminating Taoist teachings.

The most prevalent rendition portrays the Three Pure Ones refining celestial elixirs. The scene is set amid swirling mist, mountain vistas with flowing rivers, secluded dense forests and ethereal heavenly palaces. Perched on a steep cliff terrace, a gourd-shaped elixir furnace billows sacred smoke skyward. Supreme Lord Laozi sits leisurely upon stacked stones beside a small bridge; alternatively, the Three Pure Ones each hold auspicious mudras, gazing intently at the furnace's flickering flames. This pattern conveys that elixir refinement embodies **the Heavenly Tao**, symbolizing spiritual self-cultivation, the nurturing of innate wisdom, and the ultimate attainment of wisdom to navigate all worldly affairs with effortless ease.



Fig.2 Qing-dynasty painted ornamentation: The Three Pure Ones refining elixirs with divine powers amid heaven and earth.

3. Pattern of the Eastern King and Western Queen Mother

The composition features the Eastern King seated solemnly in cross-legged meditation, flanked on either side by openwork carvings of kneeling maiden attendants. Surrounding him are intricately carved phoenixes, songbirds, qilin, ducks and other mythical creatures.

In the lower section, the Western Queen Mother sits in dignified repose, with the sun and moon shining symmetrically beside her head — a symbol of her eternal existence alongside celestial luminaries. Two female attendants kneel at her sides, with carved tortoises, serpents and bears surrounding the scene.

At the center, the Western Queen Mother watches dragons soar through the sky, while eight immortals behind her observe the spectacle with varied expressions. The four rearmost immortals stand in paired formation: the two on the left carry flower baskets, while the two on the right accompany a phoenix.

On the opposite left side, another four immortals gaze upward in awe. The final figure, the God of Longevity, watches frolicking deer. The entire composition is lively and festive, serene and ethereal, rendered with vivid, lifelike detail.

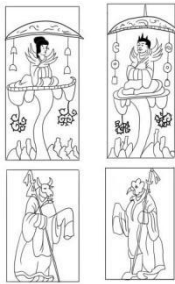


Fig.3 Han-dynasty brick relief: The serpent-bodied Eastern King and Western Queen Mother practicing spiritual cultivation.

4. Pattern of the Five Great Mountain Emperors

For generations, ancient people dwelled amid lofty, majestic, mist-shrouded and enigmatic mountains, giving rise to the worship and sacrificial veneration of mountain deities. Thus, the motif of the Five Great Mountain Emperors emerged in residential shrines as divine guardians of mortal welfare.

Each deity wears an ornate Nine-Dan Sun Essence crown, pearl-embroidered imperial robes, and a luminous celestial jade seal at the waist.

- The Great Emperor of the Eastern Mountain rides a five-colored divine ox, governing fortune and misfortune in both the mortal and nether realms as a divine messenger mediating between heaven and humanity.
- The Great Emperor of the Southern Mountain mounts a fiery-eyed mythical beast, ruling over the southern territories, alleviating mortal hardships and bestowing blessings of fortune, prosperity and longevity.
- The Great Emperor of the Western Mountain rides a black steed, presiding over rivers, lakes, seas and wild beasts, depicted as a tamer of natural creatures.
- The Great Emperor of the Northern Mountain rides a fierce yellow steed, overseeing constellations and celestial divisions as a bridge between heaven and earth.
- The Great Emperor of the Central Mountain rides a cyan steed, governing lands, mountains and woodlands, embodying the Taoist immortal wandering freely amid mountains and forests.



Fig.4Qing-dynasty painted ornamentation: The Five Great Mountain Emperors dispensing blessings over the world amid drifting clouds.

5. Pattern of the True Martial Great Emperor

Also titled the Heavenly Sovereign of the Northern Void and the God of Water, he is a highly revered celestial lord of Jade Capital in the Taoist pantheon, symbolizing the interplay of Yin and Yang and the gestation of all living things. For this reason, his image is commonly found on residential gate facades and household shrines.

Depictions show the True Martial Great Emperor seated upright on a dragon throne, with neat long hair, a full forehead and full battle armor. He forms a sacred mudra with his left hand and grasps a divine sword in his right, barefooted, with a divine tortoise and serpent lying peacefully at his feet.

Regarded as the patron ancestor of martial arts, he symbolizes health, safety, wisdom and courage, empowering believers to overcome hardships and adversities. The tortoise and serpent beneath him embody longevity and immortality.



Fig.5Qing-dynasty painted ornamentation: The True Martial Great Emperor performing rituals to invoke blessings.

6. Pattern of the God of Literature

As the fourth star in the Big Dipper constellation, also known as the Star of Literary Prosperity, this deity presides over official rank and scholarly fortune, revered as the patron saint of Confucian scholars and imperial examination candidates.

Legend recounts that Zhang Yazhi, a native of Mengxi in Sichuan during the Jin Dynasty, underwent seventy-two spiritual transformations and died in service in Zitong County, Mianyang. Later scholars merged his identity with the God of Zitong, collectively honoring him as the God of Literature and Zitong. He is also venerated as the Star of Martial Strategy and Wisdom.

In decorative motifs, the God of Literature wears a tall ceremonial crown and official robes with tall court boots. He holds a ruyi scepter in his right hand and rests his left on his waist belt, or clutches an imperial seal. Portrayed either seated on a dragon throne or standing upright, he is sometimes accompanied by the God of Literary Attainment and imperial messengers, with several boy attendants standing in waiting behind him. He is the divine patron of scholarly success and examination triumph.



Fig.6Qing-dynasty wood carving: The God of Literature holding a ruyi scepter to bless the mortal world.

7. Pattern of the Heavenly Official Bestowing Blessings

This deity is the First-Grade Upper Primordial Heavenly Official of Blessings, also incarnate as the Great Emperor of the Purple Tenuity. He is commonly depicted holding a large ruyi scepter, imperial seal, ritual wine goblet, treasure ingot or sacred sword.

Dressed in official headwear, robes and boots, the Heavenly Official typically appears in paired compositions:

- The left figure holds an official crown or seal, while the right bears a ritual goblet or sacred deer, or carries inscribed couplets reading *Heavenly Official Bestows Blessings* and *First-Rank Court Official*, symbolizing official promotion and career advancement.
- Combinations of ruyi scepter, imperial seal and sword signify unparalleled mastery in both civil and military affairs.
- Paired with the God of Literature, he represents leisurely ease and tranquil contentment.
- Accompanied by Heavenly Kui and Heavenly Yue, he embodies gentle temperament and widespread admiration.
- Matched with symbolic emblems of fortune, power and academic success, he denotes simultaneous fame and wealth.
- Flanked by the Left and Right Guardian Immortals, he symbolizes contentment with one's lot, alongside blessings for good fortune and disaster abatement.



Fig.7Qing-dynasty wood carving: The Heavenly Official bearing auspicious inscriptions to bless mortal beings.

8. Pattern of Ling Lun with Auspicious Beasts

This motif is mostly arranged in symmetrical compositions for residential decoration. Legend holds that Ling Lun served as court musician under the Yellow Emperor. Over 4,500 years ago, he established the tonal system and formulated the twelve ancient musical scales, earning him the title of the founding father of Chinese music. *Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei · Ancient Music* records: “In antiquity, the Yellow Emperor commanded Ling Lun to establish musical pitch.”

Imitating the chirping of phoenixes, Ling Lun crafted flutes from straight, evenly grown bamboo stalks, playing timeless melodies of life.

Artistic depictions set the scene amid vast ocean waves: Ling Lun wears a bamboo hat, plays a horizontal flute, and rides an auspicious beast with a fish tail and ox (or ram) horns.

This pattern expresses the joy of victory and celebration, embodies the subduing of demons and disaster relief through sacrificial rituals, and conveys harmonious prosperity through the beauty of music.



Fig.8Qing-dynasty wood carving: Ling Lun playing the bamboo flute to sing paeans of universal peace.

9. Pattern of Laozi

Laozi was a prominent thinker of the Spring and Autumn Period, the founder of the Taoist school, and one of ancient China’s greatest philosophers, litterateurs and historians. Tang Dynasty emperors honored him as the ancestral progenitor of the imperial Li clan. His surviving work *Tao Te Ching* and his philosophy of governing through non-interference, alongside concepts of self-cultivation, tranquility, harmony and cosmic circulation, are widely adopted as decorative themes in ancient architecture.

Two classic thematic depictions:

(1) **Laozi's Transcendence:** Amid curling auspicious clouds and idyllic fairyland scenery, Laozi communes with heaven and earth, the radiant *Tao Te Ching* resting beside him. Alternatively, he rides an ox out of the mountains, escorted by attendants and boy servants.

(2) **Purple Qi Arriving from the East:** Beneath the blazing rising sun and auspicious purple celestial aura, Laozi rides a green ox toward Hangu Pass, where Yin Xi, the pass garrison commander, awaits him. This theme is titled *Yin Xi Seeking Instruction from the Master* and *Laozi Departing the Mountains*.



Fig.9Qing-dynasty wood carving: Laozi riding a green ox and bearing heavenly scriptures on his journey from the mountains.

10. Pattern of Zhuangzi Dreaming of Butterflies

Zhuangzi was a distinguished thinker, philosopher and litterateur of the Warring States Period, the ultimate synthesizer and propagator of Taoist doctrine. Alongside Laozi, he is collectively referred to as **Lao-Zhuang**. His philosophies of **Tao emulates nature** and **tranquil inaction** have long influenced decorative motifs in ancient architecture.

- **Zhuangzi Transforms into Butterflies:** Amid wild mountains and grotesque rock formations, Zhuangzi lies in drunken repose beside a desk piled with scrolls, as butterflies flit freely among flowers and foliage. The allusion symbolizes life as an elusive, illusory dream beyond full comprehension.
- **Zhuangzi Fishing by the Pu River:** The King of Chu stands on the riverbank with attendants, inviting Zhuangzi to assume high official office. Zhuangzi sits quietly fishing with a rod, a proud divine tortoise beside him, while a court official gestures toward the creature.

This pattern serves as a moral caution against craving official fame and worldly status. In a complex secular world, people ought to pursue spiritual freedom, return to primordial simplicity, and uphold a morally upright outlook on life.



Fig.10Qing-dynasty wood carving: Zhuangzi dreaming and transforming into butterflies on his couch.

11. Pattern of Wang Zhi and the Decayed Axe Handle

This motif originates from *Records of Remembrances* by Yu Xi, an Eastern Jin Dynasty astronomer. *Lanke* (decayed axe handle) is an ancient poetic term for the game of Go.

Book of Sui · Bibliography · Biographies of Immortals records: Wang Zhi, a native of Quzhou during the Jin Dynasty, ventured into the mountains to cut firewood. He chanced upon a fairy cave and became engrossed watching two immortals play Go, losing all sense of time. When the immortals urged him to return home, he discovered his axe handle had completely rotted away. After what felt like a single day in the cave, he returned to the mortal world to find centuries had passed; his relatives and hometown were long gone. The timeless saying “*One day in heaven, a hundred years on earth*” derives from this legend.

In the motif’s depiction, immortals play Go in a mountain cave fairyland, while Wang Zhi stands transfixed, his woodcutter’s axe resting at his feet.

Symbolic implications:

- (1) To accomplish great undertakings, one must uphold firm resolve, resist external distractions and persevere relentlessly.
- (2) Time passes fleetingly; people should cherish every moment and devote themselves to meaningful pursuits.
- (3) Mythological wisdom offers a lens to interpret mysterious and unfamiliar natural phenomena.
- (4) The game of Go demands rigorous strategy; one should view worldly vicissitudes with calm detachment and embody the Taoist spiritual realm of *one thought spanning a thousand years*.

The pattern also serves as a cautionary fable against indulging in trivial amusements that squander one’s life potential.



Fig.11Qing-dynasty wood carving: Woodcutter Wang Zhi carrying a firewood pole watching immortals play Go.

12. Pattern of Ge Hong Refining Elixirs

During the Southern Dynasties, Ge Hong traveled extensively in search of sacred sites for elixir refinement. Accompanied by his wife, he visited eminent Taoist masters to study doctrines, concurrently refining elixirs, cultivating spiritual enlightenment and compiling scholarly works. He also practiced medicine and dispensed herbal remedies to the poor free of charge, earning renown as a distinguished medical scholar and philanthropist. He ultimately attained immortality, protecting mortal lives and earning enduring reverence from common people.

Artistic scenes portray Ge Hong seated on the ground while his wife sorts medicinal herbs beside him. Flames blaze fiercely beneath the elixir furnace, as sacred vapors ascend toward the heavens.

Admired for his perseverance and unyielding pursuit of wisdom, this pattern is also believed to ward off evil spirits, making it a favored decorative motif among ancient folk communities.



Fig.12Qing-dynasty painted ornamentation: Ge Hong refining elixirs deep in the mountains.

13. Patterns of the Eight Immortals and Hidden Eight Immortals

Legends of the Eight Immortals date to the Han, Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties; most extant decorative renditions draw inspiration from *Journey to the East* by Ming Dynasty author Wu Yuantai. Common themes include *The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea, Each Displaying Divine Powers, The Eight Immortals Celebrating Longevity, The Eight Immortals Warding Off Evil*, as well as the Hidden Eight Immortals — represented solely by their sacred ritual implements.

Individual Immortal Iconography

(1) Iron-Crutch Li (Li Xuan)

The most senior of the Eight Immortals, a Warring States figure who once journeyed to Mount Hua alongside Laozi. Depicted with a golden headband, unkempt hair and beard, dark complexion and wide, piercing eyes, he walks with a limp supported by an iron crutch, carrying a large gourd of divine elixirs over his shoulder. The gourd symbolizes saving all living beings and granting immortality; as a homophone for *blessing*, it embodies good fortune, nobility and glory.

(2) Zhongli Quan (Han Zhongli)

A Eastern Han Dynasty general, reputed to possess magical powers: slaying tigers with flying swords and transmuting stone into gold to aid the impoverished. He wears an unfastened robe and cloth sandals, with a ruddy, robust face, twin hair buns, dragon-shaped eyebrows and curly beard, bare-chested and leisurely fanning himself with a palm-leaf fan. His divine power grants rebirth and deliverance from peril, symbolizing kindness and altruism, while also blessing financial prosperity and mining fortunes.

(3) Zhang Guo Lao

A Tang Dynasty Taoist priest renowned for miraculous medical skills and profound wisdom, honored by Emperor Xuanzong of Tang. Portrayed as an elderly long-bearded sage in Taoist crown and robes, he holds a walking staff and rides a white crane, white bat, or a white donkey ridden backward. Background inscriptions such as *Qixia Temple* and *Ancient Immortal Cave* often feature in compositions. He carries a fish drum to bestow blessings upon the world, symbolizing familial moral heritage and compassion. Riding backward serves as a reminder for mortals to reflect on their lives, embodying benevolence and wisdom that bring good fortune, health and prosperity.

(4) Lü Dongbin (Lü Yan)

Said to be a royal descendant of the Tang Dynasty who adopted the surname Lü to evade imperial persecution. He wears a folded Pure Yang headscarf, Taoist robe and wide-legged trousers with cloud-toed boots, with a long rectangular face and neatly trimmed beard. Resting one hand on his waist and holding a sword or whisk in the other, he carries his Pure Yang sword over his shoulder. Compassionate and unrestrained, he embodies chivalry in saving mortal souls, subduing evil and guarding wealth, celebrated worldwide for self-cultivation, moral integrity and charitable deeds.

(5) He Xiang (He Qiong)

A female immortal of the Wu Zhou period in the Tang Dynasty, with legendary birthplaces recorded across Guangxi, Fujian, Zhejiang, Anhui and Hunan. Tales recount she attained immortality by consuming celestial peaches or mica bestowed by Lü Dongbin. She wears a lotus garland, colorful rosy robes and pearl slippers, with delicate features and flowing ribbons, holding a lotus blossom to her shoulder. Calm and serene, her image is often paired with the inscription *Phoenix Terrace*. The lotus symbolizes purity and moral integrity, flourishing wealth and enduring fortune, alongside the divine power to command wind and rain.

(6) Lan Caihe

A Tang Dynasty hermit embodying all walks of life: male and female, young and old, wealthy and poor, beautiful and ugly, virtuous and malicious. He wears a straw hat

and tattered robes, one foot shod and the other bare, holding a flower basket while wandering city streets, begging and singing in joyful intoxication. A master brewer who could drink heavily without inebriation, he is revered as the patron saint of the brewing industry. Paired with the God of Longevity, pine trees and cranes, he conveys blessings of longevity; a flower basket filled with celestial treasures symbolizes divine foresight, familial harmony and prosperous descendants.

(7) **Han Xiangzi**

Believed to be the nephew or grandnephew of the scholar Han Yu, he passed the imperial examination and held official posts in the Tang court. He wears a green gauze headscarf adorned with Yin-Yang ribbons and sun-moon pendants, dressed in a purple robe embroidered with the Big Dipper and Eight Trigrams, fastened with an ornate waist sash. His bamboo flute (purple xiao) revives all living things, symbolizing vitality, joy, health and prosperity.

(8) **Cao Guojiu (Cao Jingxiu)**

A native of Lingshou, Hebei, grandson of General Cao Bin and younger brother of Empress Cao of the Song Dynasty. Gentle and refined, he excels in music, Go, archery and poetry, depicted in official robes holding a jade ritual tablet. His tranquil demeanor calms the mind and frees the spirit from worldly distractions, symbolizing inner peace, festive celebration, favorable weather and national prosperity.

Group compositions depict the Eight Immortals feasting and celebrating longevity in merry intoxication, riding auspicious beasts with ritual implements roaming the mortal realm, or paired in twos and fours engaged in leisurely pursuits.



Fig.13-1Qing-dynasty wood carving: Iron-Crutch Li, He Xiangu



Fig.13-2Qing-dynasty wood carving: Lü Dongbin, Lan Caihe



Fig.13-3Qing-dynasty wood carving: Han Zhongli, Zhang Guo Lao



Fig.13-4Qing-dynasty wood carving: Han Xiangzi, Cao Guojiu.

Hidden Eight Immortals Pattern

Represented exclusively by their symbolic ritual implements, this motif often combines with scrolling grass, interlocking floral and ribbon patterns, or adorns individual spaces in ancient architectural decoration:

- Iron-Crutch Li's gourd: Salvation of all beings, eternal longevity
- Zhongli Quan's palm-leaf fan: Deliverance from peril, spiritual rebirth
- Zhang Guo Lao's fish drum: Foresight of past and future, alignment with heavenly destiny
- Lü Dongbin's sword: Subjugation of demons, dispelling evil spirits
- He Xiangu's lotus: Spiritual self-cultivation, untainted purity
- Lan Caihe's flower basket: Communion with celestial deities
- Han Xiangzi's bamboo flute: Revitalization of all life, flourishing career
- Cao Guojiu's Yin-Yang jade tablet: Purification of surroundings, calm mind and spirit



Fig.13-5Qing-dynasty wood carving: Sword, gourd



Fig.13-6Qing-dynasty wood carving: flower basket, bamboo flute



Fig.13-7Qing-dynasty wood carving: jade tablet, fish drum,



Fig.13-8Qing-dynasty wood carving:palm-leaf fan, lotus blossom.

14. Pattern of Liu Hai Teasing the Golden Toad

Liu Hai, originally named Liu Xuanying, courtesy name Ha Chan, was a benevolent figure of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. From childhood, he studied Huang-Lao Taoist philosophy. Enlightened and initiated into esoteric alchemy by Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin, he retreated to the Zhongnan Mountains and attained immortality.

One day, he healed an injured three-legged golden toad, which repaid his kindness by transforming into a graceful maiden and marrying him. The toad spat forth gold ingots and treasure coins, becoming a timeless symbol of wealth attraction and prosperity.

Depictions show Liu Hai with a round, childlike countenance, clutching treasure coins or ingots, playfully teasing the toad with his hands or feet. The folk proverb states: “*Liu Hai teases the golden toad, drawing wealth with every step.*” Liu Hai and the golden toad symbolize flourishing official and financial fortune, perpetual good luck and enduring prosperity.



Fig.14Ming-dynasty wood carving: Liu Hai teasing the golden toad amid celestial scenery.

15. Pattern of Zhong Kui Escorting His Sister’s Wedding

Du Ping, a townsman and close friend of Zhong Kui — a top imperial examination scholar of the Tang Dynasty — was renowned for benevolence and funded Zhong Kui’s journey to the capital for the imperial exam. Zhong Kui achieved the top rank of Zhuangyuan, yet the emperor dismissed him solely for his unattractive appearance.

Overcome with rage and grief, Zhong Kui dashed himself against the palace steps and died. Du Ping arranged a solemn burial in his honor.

To repay Du Ping's lifelong kindness, Zhong Kui led a retinue of ghost attendants to escort his sister to marry Du Ping on New Year's Eve.

The scene portrays Du Ping and attendants pushing a cart laden with gold and silver ingots. Zhong Kui greets them joyfully, while his sister gazes shyly toward Du Ping. Musicians play gongs, drums and traditional instruments, with a wedding sedan chair and full ceremonial gifts completing the lively festive wedding scene.



Fig.15Qing-dynasty wood carving: Zhong Kui preparing dowries and escorting his sister to her husband's household.

16. Pattern of the Wealth-Attracting Boy

Originating in the Tang Dynasty, the Wealth-Attracting Boy evolved from the Golden Boy attendant beside the Goddess Guanyin. Legend records that countless treasures spontaneously emerged upon his birth, giving rise to his name.

Depicted holding a treasure plate or gold ingot, riding an elephant bearing treasures and ruyi scepters, or welcoming flying bats with outstretched hands. He serves as a lucky talisman for children's growth, symbolizing wealth accumulation, blessings, good fortune, success, academic triumph and peace.



Fig.16Qing-dynasty wood carving: The Golden Boy attracting wealth and gathering blessings.

17. Pattern of Zhang Sanfeng

Styled Junbao, Quanyi and Ziyuan, with the Taoist religious title Sanfeng. A paramount martial arts master of the Song Dynasty, he founded internal martial arts, the Wudang School, original Tai Chi and Dragon-Style Calligraphy, achieving unparalleled mastery in martial practice. His Tai Chi Boxing and Tai Chi Sword have remained influential for generations.

The motif is set against the rugged mountain backdrops of iconic Taoist sacred sites: Qiyun Mountain (Anhui), Wudang Mountain (Hubei), Qingcheng Mountain (Sichuan), Longhu Mountain (Jiangxi). Cliff faces bear inscriptions such as *Blessing and Longevity Mountain*, *Qingcheng*, *Five Immortal Caves* and *Tianshi Mountain*. Taoist temples, feng shui pagodas and martial practitioners adorn the slopes, with Zhang Sanfeng depicted refining elixirs or practicing Tai Chi. Surrounding decorative elements include pine, cypress, lotus, peony and interlocking flowers; auspicious beasts feature dragons, qilin, celestial bulls, heavenly steeds, sea horses, lions, deer, peacocks, cranes, bats, fish and butterflies.



Fig.17Qing-dynasty painted ornamentation: Zhang Sanfeng embodying immortal Taoist bearing.

18. Pattern of Turning Stones into Sheep

Recorded in *Young Scholar's Treasury of Allusions* by Ming Dynasty scholar Cheng Dengji: “*Calling a deer a horse was Zhao Gao's deceit of his lord; turning stones into sheep marked Huang Chuping's attainment of immortality.*”

Legend tells that fourteen-year-old Huang Chuping herded sheep in the mountains during the Jin Dynasty, where he encountered an immortal sage who imparted profound Taoist arts in a stone cave on Jinhua Mountain. Forty years later, his elder brother Huang Chuqi located him and inquired about the flock. Huang Chuping gestured to the white stones covering the eastern mountains and called aloud, instantly summoning tens of thousands of sheep to gather.

The composition depicts remote mountain valleys with an immortal palace nestled within. A young immortal holding a divine tree stands behind the sage, who faces the two Huang brothers. Huang Chuping raises his hands to conjure sheep from stone, while his elder brother distinguishes the sheep amid the rock piles.

This pattern marvels at divine supernatural power, honors the attainment of immortality and spiritual perfection, and symbolizes transmuting the ordinary into the extraordinary, turning decay into wonder.



Fig.18Qing-dynasty gilded wood carving: The immortal Huang Chuping conjuring flocks of sheep from stones.

19. Taoist Ritual Implements and Hundred Treasures

Taoist ritual implements are widely adopted in traditional residential decoration, including Mixed Eight Treasures, Radiant Eight Treasures and Folk Hundred Treasures. With diverse, unregulated combinations, motifs of heavenly bells, wooden fish, ritual drums, ruyi scepters, stone chimes, water basins, hand bells, cymbals, command flags, religious streamers, court tablets, ritual rulers, magic swords, Taoist seals and spiritual tokens symbolize good fortune and disaster avoidance. They also remind people to recuperate amid adversity, strive diligently and forge forward unceasingly.

Hundred Treasures motifs feature eclectic combinations of rare artifacts and daily vessels: bead strings, bracelets, coral, rhinoceros horn cups, ivory, jade discs, jade rings, silver ingots, ancient coins, waist belts, tea bowls, wine pots, ritual furnaces, pearls, jade fish and auspicious clouds — blessing people with happy, prosperous lives and the fulfillment of all wishes.

Compositions incorporating dragon gates, ritual goblets, books, scroll paintings, bronze mirrors, pine trees, mugwort leaves, red leaves, plantain leaves, glossy ganoderma and gourds symbolize vitality, boundless blessings and pervasive good fortune.

The swastika emblem, celestial sphere, drum clappers and antique motifs dispel all inauspicious influences.

- **Pearl:** Wealth, perfection, official rank and a promising future
- **Celestial sphere:** Eternal peace
- **Dragon gate:** Academic success, career promotion and illustrious achievement
- **Ritual furnace:** National sovereignty, social status, peace and prosperity
- **Gold/silver ingot:** Abundant wealth; homophonic symbolism of numerous descendants and talented offspring
- **Ancient coin:** Round outer rim representing heaven, square inner hole representing earth, imperial reign inscription representing humanity; symbolizing the harmony of heaven, earth and humanity with the power to reverse cosmic fortunes
- **Coral:** Nobility, authority, happiness and eternal bliss

- **Rhinoceros horn:** Divine power, good fortune, physical health, career success and evil dispelling
- **Rhinoceros horn cup:** Homophonically symbolizing generations, embodying respect for elders and affluent daily life
- **Books/Scroll paintings:** Scholarly heritage, wisdom and spiritual nourishment for life
- **Bronze mirror:** Knowledge and wisdom; used in ritual worship and marital harmony; decorates architecturally inauspicious spaces to ward off evil and protect household peace; employed by officials to groom their bearing
- **Pine tree:** Integrity, perseverance and moral nobility; symbolizing longevity, peace and good fortune
- **Red leaves:** Moral purity, friendship and auspicious career prospects
- **Mugwort leaves:** Blessings, familial harmony and physical wellness; dispelling illness and misfortune
- **Plantain leaves:** Supreme auspiciousness, vast family fortune and boundless vitality
- **Glossy ganoderma:** Good fortune, prosperity and miraculous healing power
- **Ruyi scepter:** Power, wealth and the fulfillment of wishes; symbolizing continuous auspicious events
- **Auspicious clouds:** Propitious omens, celebration and prosperity; embodying thriving family lineage and business ventures
- **Hundred Treasures waist belt:** Great wealth and affluence
- **Court tablet:** High official rank and generous emoluments

Square Sheng Pattern

Formed by two overlapping rhombuses, this motif symbolizes unity and victory. *Classic of Mountains and Seas* records that the Western Queen Mother wore a **Sheng** ornamental headpiece.

The character *Sheng* signifies victory, capability and moral responsibility; the square form embodies Confucian ethics, integrity, ambition and sincerity in word and deed. The interlocking rhombus structure symbolizes harmonious marriage, lifelong companionship and perfect marital bliss. It also functions as a Taoist talisman to ward off evil and safeguard household peace.

Folk Eight Treasures Pattern

Comprising stone chime, silver ingot, pearl, coral, amber, ancient coin, ruyi scepter, rhinoceros horn and conch:

- **Stone chime:** Invites celestial deities, dispels disasters and invokes blessings; homophonically representing celebration, symbolizing prosperity, abundance and

peaceful times. Paired with calligraphy, ink slabs and water droppers, it encourages scholars to pursue diligent study for a blessed life.

- **Silver ingot & ancient coin:** Material wealth
- **Pearl, coral & rhinoceros horn:** Mystery and noble dignity
- **Ruyi scepter:** The fulfillment of heartfelt wishes, blessings of fortune and prosperity

Combination variations:

- Ancient coins + bats: Blessings close at hand
- Ancient coins + plantain leaves: Vast wealth and affluent household
- Coins + lamps: A bright future
- Paired with the Harmony Immortals, drum clappers, dragon gates, jade fish, cranes and ganoderma: Blessings for familial health and peaceful prosperity
- Paired with jade discs and jade fish: Honoring ancestors and benefiting future generations
- Paired with dragon gates, pine, ganoderma, cranes and drum clappers: Immortal protection, top academic rank, surplus blessings and longevity
- Paired with bronze mirrors and feather whisks: Upright official conduct and clarity of mind; the whisk sweeps away worldly troubles
- Paired with rhinoceros horns and vases: Official authority, self-protection, evil dispelling, career success and enduring good fortune



Fig.19Qing-dynasty painted ornamentation: Mixed Eight Treasures pattern.

Rice Sieve Eight Treasures Pattern

20.Adorned with scissors, the God of Literary Attainment, bronze mirror, pearl, ritual furnace, writing brush & ink slab, bamboo flute, calligraphy & painting, almanac, abacus, measuring ruler, silver bell, miniature shoes, Eight Trigrams and Chinese zodiac motifs. Mostly installed on Taoist temple lintels and beam frames of residential main halls.

The circular rice sieve symbolizes the sun, harnessing supreme Yang energy to dispel Yin evil and safeguard physical health. Originally a grain-processing tool, its round shape embodies reunion and peace; its dense mesh holes resemble the thousand eyes of Guanyin, known as the Eye of Auspicious Fortune.

- **Rice sieve + abacus + Eight Trigrams:** A powerful talisman to neutralize evil and secure household peace

- **Abacus:** Prosperous population and wealth; intelligent children, steady academic progress and prudent household management for brides
- **Almanac:** Selection of auspicious dates; advocating integrity, moral virtue and self-cultivation
- **Measuring ruler:** Enduring happiness for descendants, harmonious marriage, career advancement and proper conduct
- **Silver bell:** Intelligent children, tranquility and good fortune

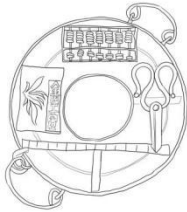


Fig.20Qing-dynasty silver artifact: Hundred Treasures pattern.

21. Ritual Bell Pattern

Also known as the Three Pure Ones Bell. Bronze bells dating to the Erlitou Site of the Xia Dynasty have been unearthed; *The Book of Songs* records ritual bells invoking longevity, prosperous livelihoods and enduring career success.

In the Han Dynasty, bronze bells evolved into Three Pure Ones Bells for Taoist rituals, featuring a mountain-shaped handle with a central sword and flanking halberds — symbolizing the Three Pure Ones. Often paired with teacups and water basins, they serve to summon deities, dispel demons and attract auspicious blessings.



Fig.21Qing-dynasty bronze artifact: Ritual hand bell.

22. Wooden Fish Pattern

Also referred to as a wooden drum. Taoist priests strike wooden fish during scripture recitation rituals to invoke blessings. Crafted in fish-shaped or flat circular forms. Since fish never close their eyes day or night, the wooden fish serves as a reminder for practitioners to uphold constant spiritual cultivation. It dispels misfortune, encourages scholars to maintain focus in their studies, and blesses peace and good fortune.

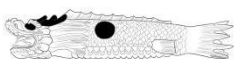


Fig.22Ming-dynasty gilded wood carving: Large and medium-sized wooden fish.

23. Ritual Drum Pattern

Available in cylindrical and oblate forms, in two sizes. Large drums mark the morning opening and evening closing of Taoist temple rituals; small drums accompany ritual hand bells during ceremonies. Drum beats evoke the rhythm of wind, cloud, thunder and rain, inspiring diligence in scholarly pursuits, summoning celestial deities and expelling malicious spirits.



Fig.23Qing-dynasty drum surface ornamentation: Hand drum engraved with Eight Trigrams and Tai Chi motifs.

24. Ruyi Scepter Handle Pattern

The ruyi scepter features cloud-shaped finials and a curved handle, originating from pre-Qin waist ornaments. Historical records mention imperial jade ruyi scepters buried by Emperor Qin Shi Huang. Later adopted as personal adornments, cast metal ruyi also served for self-defense. Emperors bestowed ruyi upon meritorious officials and used them as tokens in selecting imperial concubines. Reserved for senior Taoist masters, they are crafted from jade, wood or bone.

Its overall silhouette resembles the Chinese character **xin (heart)**, with three decorative segments: cloud or ganoderma-shaped finials symbolizing descending auspicious blessings; a circular central section representing **Tao transforming into the Three Pure Ones**, honoring the three treasures of Taoism: the Dao, Scriptures and Masters. Folk legend regards the ruyi as a divine weapon wielded by the Yellow Emperor to defeat Chiyou, possessing the power to subdue demons and recite sacred scriptures.



Fig.24Qing-dynasty jade and wood carving: Ruyi scepter handle engraved with Eight Trigrams motifs.

25. Water Basin Pattern

Also known as the sacred water bowl, this ritual vessel holds consecrated nectar water. Crafted from bamboo, copper or purple clay.

Depictions show a Taoist priest holding the basin in one hand and sprinkling sacred water with a willow branch to bless all living beings. Some basins are carved with the **Five Mountains True Form Chart**. This pattern symbolizes spreading peaceful nectar across the mortal world, protecting all people and dispelling disasters to invoke blessings.

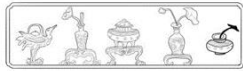


Fig.25Qing-dynasty wood carving: Water basin with ritual ladle.

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