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A CORNER OF THE MARKET, 200CM × 240CM, 2024

Paper-based colored ink by Jiang Li

SYMBIOSIS, 245CM × 220CM, 2025

Oil painting on canvas by QiJun Wang

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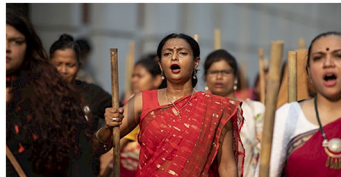
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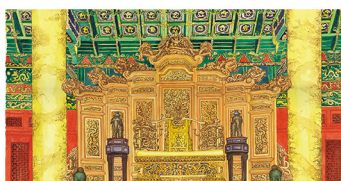


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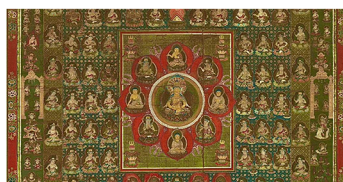


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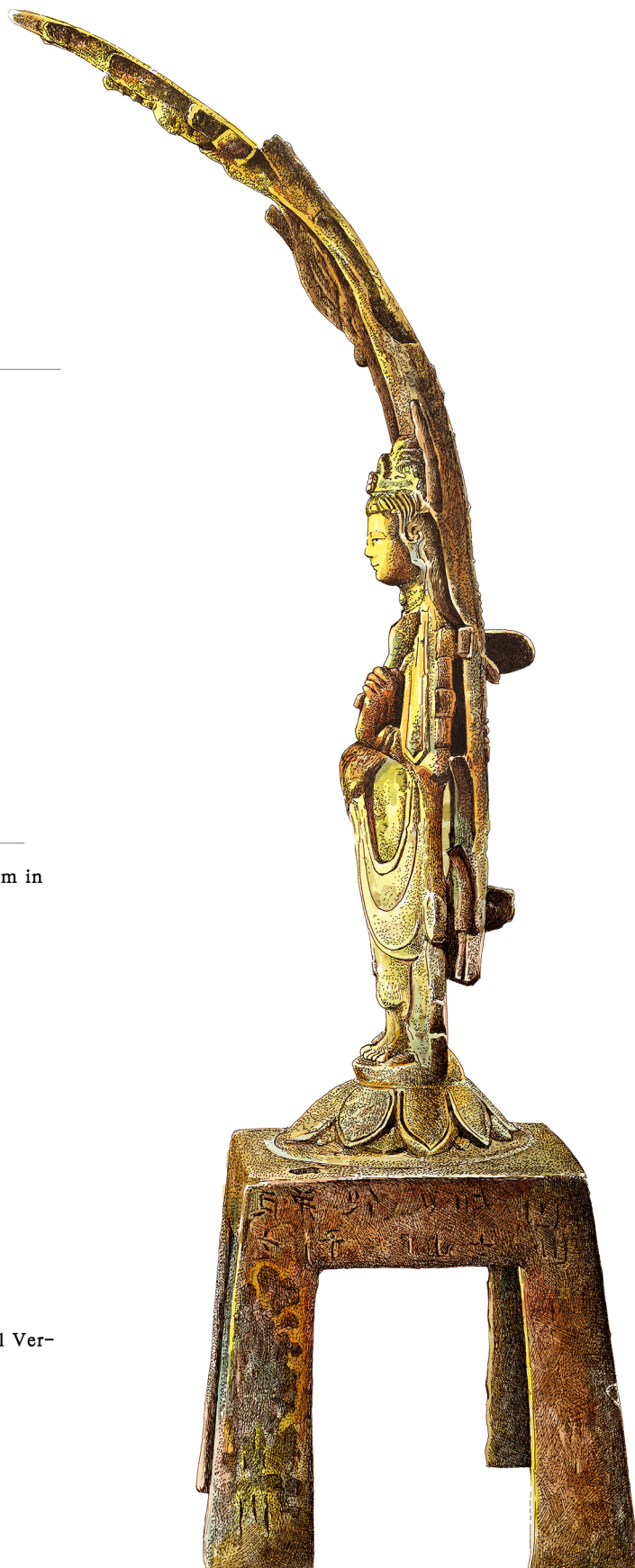


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Research Articles



Sonic Insurrection: The Auditory Politics of Bamboo Strikes and Vocalization "Hoo"

Xiao Huang

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Abstract: This study examines *Himmati Mai* (2022), a performance artwork by Bangladeshi artist Reetu Sattar, to interrogate the politics of sound, the construction of sisterhood, and the potential of artistic intervention in social transformation. The piece, featuring 70 women synchronously striking bamboo sticks and emitting the vocalization “hoo”, creates a resistive auditory landscape that challenges the suppression of female voices in Bangladeshi society. The analysis reveals: (1) Sound operates as a medium of political expression, employing rhythm, acoustic resonance, and collective synchronization to metaphorically articulate gendered violence and acoustically reclaim public space; (2) The organizational process (participant selection, rehearsal dynamics) fosters cross-class and interreligious sisterhood, transmuting individual trauma into collective political agency; (3) A tension emerges between the ephemerality of performance art and the protracted nature of institutional change, yet the work’s symbolic capital persists through media dissemination and social mobilization; (4) The practice expands Joseph Beuys’ “social sculpture” theory by integrating indigenous cultural symbols (bamboo sticks, saris) with acoustic politics, forging a dynamic mode of social intervention. The study argues that *Himmati Mai* constitutes not merely an artistic protest but an innovative feminist praxis, offering a creative paradigm for nonviolent resistance in South Asian contexts.

Keywords: sound politics; auditory landscape; collective memory; sisterhood; nonviolent resistance; social sculpture

1. Introduction

On May 28, 2022, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, seventy women from diverse social backgrounds grasped bamboo sticks, striking the ground in rhythmic unison while vocalizing elongated and staccato utterances of “hoo”. Through this performative act, the organizers and participants delivered a potent artistic response to the escalating violence against women in Bangladesh.

Shaped by the dual forces of Hindu caste hierarchy and extremist Islamism, women in Bangladesh have long been confined to the shadows of patriarchal oppression, with gender-based violence persisting as a pervasive crisis. In the first half of 2022 alone, 476 women were reported raped, yet most victims were denied judicial redress—a statistic representing only the tip of the iceberg.

To confront this deplorable social reality and provoke critical reflection on entrenched traditional norms and structures, Reetu Sattar, a Bangladeshi artist born in 1981, conceptualized, organized, and choreographed this performance art piece, titled *Himmati Mai* (Brave Mother). [1] In preparation, Sattar invested extensive effort in selecting and persuading the seventy female volunteers to participate. Once committed, the volunteers engaged in rigorous collective rehearsals during their spare time, culminating in a theatrically arresting performance on May 28, 2022.

alized, organized, and choreographed this performance art piece, titled *Himmati Mai* (Brave Mother). [1] In preparation, Sattar invested extensive effort in selecting and persuading the seventy female volunteers to participate. Once committed, the volunteers engaged in rigorous collective rehearsals during their spare time, culminating in a theatrically arresting performance on May 28, 2022.

2. The Political Poetics of Sound: Resistive Encoding of the Auditory Landscape

Sound is not merely a physical phenomenon but a carrier of social power relations. In the performance art *Himmati Mai*, the auditory landscape is meticulously designed as a language of resistance, employing rhythm, sonic vibration, and collective vocalization to challenge the suppression of women’s voices in Bangladeshi society.

2.1 The Metaphorical Rhythm of Bamboo Strikes

The synchronized striking of bamboo sticks against the ground by seventy women constructs an acoustic field laden with political signification. This carefully choreographed rhythm is not mere sound production but a semiotic practice of protest deeply rooted in cultural memory. Such acoustic intervention carries profound cultural metaphor.

The bamboo stick, a commonplace agricultural tool in rural South Asia, produces a sound that mimics the archetypal act of the marginalized knocking at the gates of power. The intervals between each strike create a Derridean experience (Derrida, 1979) of *différance* [2], symbolizing the delayed and absent judicial response, thereby constructing an auditory narrative of “awaiting justice”. This rhythmic design deconstructs the “myth of judicial efficiency” [3] (Rancière, 2010) perpetuated by official discourse, transforming procedural delays into a perceptible acoustic reality.

From the perspective of acoustic politics, the collective synchronization of rhythmic strikes holds critical resistive value. Through repetitive rhythmic training, seventy independent sound sources are synthesized into a singular sonic entity. As Turino (2008) argues in *Music as Social Life*, collective rhythmic synchronization dissolves individual differences, forging a potent group identity. [4]

2.2 The Polyphony of “Hoo”: From Silence to Collective Manifesto



Figure 1. *Himmati Mai* (2022), in Dhaka, Bangladesh, designed and organized by Reetu Sattar

Website Source: <https://www.instituteforpublicart.org/case-studies/himmati-mai/>

In *Himmati Mai*, the participants’ synchronized utterance of the staccato “hoo” constitutes a delinguified collective declaration—a polyphony that simultaneously ruptures silence and actively reconstructs oppressive social soundscapes.

The profound significance of this sonic strategy unfolds across three interrelated dimensions:

First, as a tactic of circumvention, the non-semantic plosive

sound evades the disciplining of women’s direct verbal expression in Bangladesh’s public sphere. Within Islamic cultural contexts, women’s political oration is often perceived as transgression against religious and social order. [5] (Mahmood, 2011) The “hoo” sound, as a wordless utterance, substitutes explicit slogans, enabling public vocalization while avoiding direct repression triggered by “improper speech”. This strategy resonates trans-culturally with the symbolic resistance of Iran’s “White Wednesdays” movement (ETtoday, 2017), where women wore white headscarves in lieu of vocal protest [6], collectively revealing the political potential of embodied sound in high-pressure contexts.

Second, the acoustic properties of “hoo” itself serve as a metaphorical representation of gendered violence. Its abrupt,



Figure 2. *Himmati Mai* (2022), in Dhaka, Bangladesh, designed and organized by Reetu Sattar

Website Source: <https://www.instituteforpublicart.org/case-studies/himmati-mai/>

repetitive plosives simulate sensations of suffocation and rupture. Acoustic analysis demonstrates that such discontinuous pulse waves readily trigger physiological tension in listeners [7] (Grimshaw, 2014), thereby externalizing the invisible trauma of individual victims into a collectively perceptible soundscape. This “trauma translation” mechanism aligns with Veit Erlmann’s (2004) concept of the “auditory unconscious”—when language fails to articulate violence, non-verbal sounds become vessels of memory and pain. [8]

Finally, through rigorous rhythmic synchronization, dispersed individual “hoo” sounds coalesce into a polyphonic acoustic community. The leader’s bamboo strikes establish a foundational rhythm, which participants follow to calibrate their vocal intervals, creating a wave-like superimposition effect akin to religious chanting. This technical coordination not only intensifies the protest’s ritualistic quality but also, through the physical resonance of sound waves (phase locking), produces a collective subjectivity wherein “one voice becomes all voices” [9] (Nancy, 2007). In this sense, “hoo” transcends mere protest instrumentality, materializing what Judith Butler

(2015) terms “bodies in alliance”—individual vulnerability is transformed into political resilience [10] through acoustic aggregation.

2.3 The Militarization and De-violencing of Rhythm: Dialectical Unity in Protest Aesthetics

The rhythmic design of this performance art manifests a profound dialectical unity: through highly disciplined collective striking movements, the performers simultaneously appropriate the deterrence of military aesthetics while achieving an ethical reconstitution of political resistance through rigorous nonviolent constraints. This unique grammar of protest can be analyzed through the following dimensions:

First, from the perspective of visual politics in bodily discipline, the seventy women formed a precisely arranged rectangular formation. Through repeated rehearsals, they developed synchronized sonic and corporeal languages, creating a cohesive unity. This highly standardized bodily practice directly echoes the somatic techniques of military drills, generating visual impact comparable to parade formations. However, the crucial distinction lies in this: whereas weapons in military training (e.g., rifles) are ultimately directed at human bodies, the bamboo sticks here remain vertically oriented toward the ground. This “redirection of weaponry” accomplishes a formal retention yet substantive neutralization of violent potential.

The performance’s creative transformation of traditional protest symbols warrants particular attention. Within South Asia’s complex history, the bamboo stick (*lathi*) has long functioned as an actual weapon, with the British colonial-era “*lathi charge*” becoming emblematic of violent suppression. [11] (Arnold, 2024) This performance achieves a semantic recalibration of protest tools by redirecting their target from human bodies to the ground: the bamboo stick ceases to be an instrument of violence, instead becoming an “acoustic ruler” measuring justice’s absence. Each strike marks a moment of judicial non-response, a transformation that substantiates Rancière’s (2004) concept of “redistribution of the sensible” – challenging established political imagination through reconfiguring the perceptual frameworks of material symbols. [12]

From a performance anthropology perspective, this fusion of militarized form and nonviolent essence creates a novel mode of ritualized protest. Participants elevate actual conflict into symbolic spectacle through highly stylized movements. This ritual frame simultaneously maintains protest’s solemnity while preventing violent escalation through aesthetic distance. As Turner’s (1982) ritual theory demonstrates, such performances construct “liminal spaces” where social contradictions find symbolic resolution without precipitating actual destruction. [13]

The political efficacy of this protest strategy manifests in its counter-logic against state violence apparatuses. When con-

fronting systemic violence, performers employ self-imposed discipline (maintaining precise formations, synchronized rhythms and movements) to deprive authorities of moral justification for suppression under the pretext of “maintaining order”. This approach perfectly aligns with Sharp’s (1973) theory of “political jiu-jitsu” in nonviolent resistance – absorbing oppressive energy and transforming it into moral advantage. [14]

From a cross-cultural comparative perspective, this “armed nonviolence” strategy engages in dialogue with innovative protests worldwide. Examples include Ukraine’s “Femen” using naked bodies as “weapons” [15] (FEMEN, 2024), or Thai anti-coup demonstrators adopting the “three-finger salute” (symbolizing peace, freedom, and fraternity) as an alternative to violent confrontation. [16] (Vision Thai, 2020) These cases similarly demonstrate the form/substance dialectic in protest aesthetics.

2.4 The Visual Dimension of Sonic Politics: Semiotic Tension Between Traditional Sari and Bamboo Sticks

In *Himmati Mai*, the performers’ traditional sari juxtaposed with bamboo sticks construct a semiotic system charged with tension, whose deeper signification can be decoded through a Barthesian framework. The sari, as a quintessential signifier of Bangladeshi femininity, has long been encoded within Barthes’ (1990) system of fashion semiotics [17] as symbolizing “docility”, “domesticity” and “traditional virtue” through its flowing silk texture, muted color saturation, and draped wearing style.

Yet through its deliberate pairing with bamboo sticks, the performance radically reconfigures this garment’s signified dimension – the sari’s delicate fabric no longer indexes submissive corporeality, but rather, through its visual collision with rigid implements, generates a new mythology of “confrontational grace”.

This semiotic recombination operationalizes Barthes’ *Mythologies* (1957) strategy of denaturalization: when bamboo and sari create stark visual dissonance, they symbolically rupture the “pliability” mask traditionally imposed on femininity, exposing the latent political energy beneath.

Barthes posited that when signs are dislocated from their original contexts into new systems of signification, they generate revolutionary connotative detonations. [18] (Barthes, 1977) This juxtaposition’s subversive power manifests particularly in its temporal dimension: the sari’s sartorial traditions engaging in dialectical dialogue with the bamboo strikes’ instantaneous soundwaves creates a “duration/instantaneity” paradox that precisely metaphors the dual necessities of women’s resistance – cultural continuity and tactical immediacy. Through such material-semiotic reconfiguration, the performers not only challenge Islamicate societies’ monolithic coding

of femininity, but creatively expand Barthesian semiotics' explanatory scope for cross-cultural resistance studies. When Third World women transform indigenous objects' material



Figure 3. *Himmati Mai* (2022), in Dhaka, Bangladesh, designed and organized by Reetu Sattar

Website Source: <https://www.instituteforpublicart.org/case-studies/himmati-mai/>

properties (bamboo's acoustic parameters, saris' textile data) into political grammar, they are effectively waging profound "semiotic guerrilla warfare".

2.5 The Medial Dimension of Sonic Politics: The Continuity of Sound Archives

The performance art *Himmati Mai* was recorded and circulated through social media, transforming an ephemeral act into a repeatable "sonic monument". As an audio archive, this "sonic monument" possesses a distinctive temporal politics. Unlike the static permanence of traditional monuments, these digital sound documents continuously generate new meanings through users' repeated playback, remix creations (such as protest rhythm remixes produced by DJs), and contextualized usage (like collective listening in women's safe houses). This dynamic archival practice echoes Caswell's (2021) theory of "living archives", wherein sound functions simultaneously as historical evidence and an ongoing political catalyst, with continuity and variability constituting the essential characteristics of sound archives. [19]

2.6 An Alternative Political Praxis

In Bangladesh, where women's voices are often confined to domestic spheres, this performance art forcibly reconfigured the sonic ecology of outdoor public spaces through high-decibel collective sound-making. The sharp, high-frequency sounds produced by bamboo strikes and women's vocalizations of "hoo" penetrated the urban soundscape with remarkable efficacy, ensuring the protest's audibility would not be drowned out by ambient noise.

This artistic intervention effectively achieved an acoustic in-

trusion into male-dominated spaces, facilitating the transference of women's voices—whether mediated through external objects like bamboo sticks or emanating directly from their bodies through vocal cords—from private to public sonic domains. The performers induced in their oppressors a visceral experience of being surrounded and suffocated by women's voices, accomplishing this not through violence but via sound's inescapable physical presence.

Whereas traditional protests often rely on static assemblies (such as sit-ins), *Himmati Mai* created a dynamic acoustic field through mobile sound sources (participants could walk while performing, forming processional configurations). This innovative approach amplified the work's impact, extending its reach and fostering broader social resonance, thereby actualizing a form of mobile sonic resistance.

3. The Construction of Sisterhood: Affective Bonds and the Generation of Political Agency

Within patriarchal social structures, women are often confined to private spheres, their interpersonal connections systematically weakened. Yet Bangladeshi artist Reetu Sattar's performance project *Himmati Mai*, which organized seventy previously unacquainted women to collectively confront gender-based violence through artistic action, reveals the generative process through which sisterhood emerges as a form of political power. This phenomenon invites critical examination of how women transcend social barriers to forge bonds of solidarity rooted in shared trauma and collective resistance.

3.1 Selective Invitation: The Preliminary Formation of Sisterly Alliance

Reetu Sattar's meticulous selection of participants constituted in itself a nascent construction of sisterhood. The artist deliberately recruited women across social strata, encompassing diverse class backgrounds, professional occupations and religious affiliations.

This intentional heterogeneity disrupted Bangladesh's normative social divisions where women are typically segregated by both caste hierarchies and Islamic jurisprudence - where upper-class women rarely interact with slum-dwelling victims of violence, and Muslim and Hindu women seldom collaborate due to religious differences. By foregrounding "gender violence" as a universal experience, the artist transformed individual distinctions into foundations for collective identity. The persuasion process further intensified affective bonds.

Sattar had to directly confront participants' fears of public protest (potential retaliatory consequences) and their unfamiliarity with performance art (as an unconventional resistance format). Through painstaking effort, she enabled these strangers to recognize their suffering not as isolated incidents but as manifestations of structural gender oppression.

This dual process of selection and persuasion embodied emotional labor in its truest sense - labor that yielded significant returns as evidenced by the seventy volunteers who ultimately joined what became both a “collective healing ritual” and a “shoulder-to-shoulder resistance ceremony”.

3.2 Rehearsal as Social Laboratory: From Technical Coordination to Affective Community

The rehearsal process emerged as a crucial incubator for sisterhood formation. Participants were required to synchronize two distinct actions: the physical rhythm of bamboo strikes against the ground and the unified vocalization of “hoo” sounds. This demand for precise coordination necessitated continuous interaction among the women - adjusting force intensity, calibrating temporal sequences, and mutually correcting imperfections. As sociologist Silvia Federici (2012) has observed, collective labor practices (such as traditional women’s weaving or agricultural work) have historically fostered female solidarity. [20] In this context, the rehearsals functioned as metaphorical collective labor, reconstructing through bodily collaboration the feminine bonds systematically severed by patriarchal structures.

Of particular significance was the strategic utilization of leisure time during rehearsals. In Bangladeshi society, women’s spare time is typically monopolized by domestic chores and childrearing obligations. The voluntary investment of this precious time into rehearsal constituted an act of rebellion against patriarchal temporal economies. By sacrificing personal time for collective creation, the participants’ choice inherently carried the symbolic weight of pledging allegiance to their sisterly alliance.

3.3 The Performative Moment: Public Manifestation of Sisterhood

The May 28, 2022 performance marked the transformation of sisterhood from private bonds to public declaration. The synchronized striking of seventy bamboo sticks served dual symbolic functions: it simultaneously mimicked the gavel of courtroom justice (voicing protest against judicial failure) and recalled traditional Bengali women’s collective defense postures when wielding sticks against wild animals. This semiotic duality encoded individual anger into a language of collective resistance. Meanwhile, the rhythmic variations in the “hoo” vocalizations preserved distinct individual voices within the chorus - demonstrating that sisterhood demands not homogenization but rather “unity in diversity” [21] (Ahmed, 2017). This cathartic moment signaled the emergence of a temporal sisterhood community.

Reetu Sattar’s performance project substantiates that sisterhood is not naturally occurring but actively constructed through shared purpose, emotional labor, and physical collaboration. [22] (Ahmed, 2017) When the seventy women struck the ground with bamboo sticks, they were not merely

knocking on the doors of the judicial system, but more profoundly, breaking down the walls between each other’s hearts. Although initiated through an artistic project, this solidarity gained enduring significance through its confrontation with structural violence, offering South Asian feminist movements an innovative organizational paradigm of “art as catalytic medium and solidarity power” [23] (Kester, 2011).

4. The Paradox of Institutional Change: The Temporal Tension Between Performance Art’s Ephemerality and Legal Reform’s Longue Durée

Performance art as a form of political resistance inherently embodies a structural contradiction between “instantaneous impact” and “enduring transformation”. In the case of *Himmat Mai*, seventy women created a potent theatrical event through highly ritualized bamboo-striking performance, whose acoustic force and visual spectacle momentarily ruptured the habitual perceptual frameworks of Bangladesh’s public sphere.

Yet between this aesthetic politics’ temporal intensity and the sustained momentum required for judicial reform lies an irreconcilable temporal disjuncture - performance art’s “eventness” [24] (Badiou, 2007) is fundamentally non-cumulative and unrepeatable, whereas legal transformation demands continuous legislative lobbying, precedent accumulation, and enforcement monitoring. This paradox substantiates Rancière’s (2010) fundamental conflict between “the political” and “the police”: artistic action may temporarily tear the established distribution of the sensible, but institutional machinery possesses formidable self-reparative inertia. [25]

A more profound contradiction resides in performance art’s dependence on immediate theatrical presence and subsequent media “spectacularization”, while legal reform requires disenchanted technical negotiation. This ontological disparity causes significant dissipation of activist energy during its transition from streets to legislative chambers.

Yet this doesn’t render artistic action futile. The “symbolic capital” generated by the performance may still bridge the ephemeral-institutional divide through multiple afterlife trajectories - for instance, local female political candidates adopting the performance’s audio as campaign ringtones, thereby transforming artistic protest into political mobilization tools.

Mouffe’s (2013) “agonistic democracy” strategy [26] proves viable here: when direct institutional breakthrough is obstructed, artistic action cultivates latent conditions for legal change by altering societal cognitive schemas. This dialectic suggests moving beyond binary “effective/ineffective” judgments to instead examine how protest art functions as an “affective catalyst” [27] in protracted institutional transfor-

mation - much like how each bamboo strike simultaneously dissipates while propagating vibrations through the ground, social change requires both instantaneous force and enduring reverberations.

5. Performance Art as Social Sculpture: Reconstructing and Expanding Beuysian Theory

Within Joseph Beuys' theoretical framework of *Soziale Plastik* (Social Sculpture) [28], the performance art piece *Himmati Mai* demonstrates new possibilities for socially engaged artistic practice in contemporary contexts. Beuys' proposition that *Jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler* (Every human is an artist) [29] finds cross-cultural validation here - through highly organized collective striking, seventy non-professional performers transformed social protest itself into a creative formative process with aesthetic dimensions. This artistic action transcends the material stasis of traditional sculpture, instead shaping what might be termed an "acoustic-social complex", thereby actualizing Beuys' concept of *Soziale Plastik*.

Particularly noteworthy is how the participants' rectangular formation constituted a temporary social sculpture space, engaging in transhistorical dialogue with Beuys' urban planning aesthetics in *7000 Oaks*. At this planetary antipode, the biological temporality of plant growth appears compressed into the immediate political efficacy of soundwave transmission.

Examined through the lens of material politics, this work significantly expands the conceptual boundaries of "social sculpture" as an artistic medium. While Beuys privileged organic materials like fat and felt for their spiritual symbolism, Reetu Sattar's selection of bamboo sticks - materials embodying both rigidity and flexibility - serves as a perfect material analogue for the lived realities of Third World women. When seventy bamboo sticks strike the ground in unison with seventy voices articulating the "hoo" sound, the resulting acoustic phenomenon constitutes not merely an auditory sculpture, but through its vibrational waves directly interfacing with spectators' physiological perception, materializes Beuys' ideal of sensory integration within his "expanded concept of art" (*erweiterter Kunstbegriff*) [30]. This transformation of acoustic energy into political potency powerfully validates the core proposition of social sculpture theory: that art should become the formative force (*plastische Kraft*) [31] capable of reshaping the social organism.

From an anthropological perspective, the work incorporates indigenous cultural symbols into the global discourse of "social sculpture". The juxtaposition of saris and bamboo sticks in the performance creatively transforms Beuys' fascination with European primitivism, replacing it with aesthetic resources from South Asian agrarian civilization. This distinctive configuration provides "social sculpture" with localized epistemological support, circumventing the pitfalls of West-

ern-centric transplantation. Such localized practice offers a Global South corrective to "social sculpture" theory—when the acoustic phenomena generated by *Himmati Mai* confront both patriarchal discipline and urban noise pollution, the work not only shapes social relations but fundamentally restructures the auditory political ecology of postcolonial cities.

Ultimately, the work reveals the essential nature of "social sculpture" as an ongoing process. Through potential digital archiving (blockchain authentication) of the performance's acoustic records and annual commemorative reenactments, *Himmati Mai* could render intangible social transformation perceptible through artistic form. This suggests that contemporary "social sculpture" derives value not from momentary theatrical effects, but from its capacity to initiate self-replicating social formation mechanisms—true social sculpture remains perpetually in the present progressive tense.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

6.1 Methodological Constraints: Absence of Fieldwork and In-Depth Interviews

The analysis of *Himmati Mai* in this study primarily relies on publicly available materials, archival documentation, and theoretical extrapolation, lacking firsthand ethnographic fieldwork or in-depth interviews with organizer Reetu Sattar and participants. This limitation introduces several critical gaps:

Uncaptured Individual Experiences: The specific backgrounds of the seventy participants (age, occupation, religious affiliation), their motivations for joining, and personal transformations post-performance remain underexplored. For instance, did rehearsal processes foster mutual support networks? Did participation alter any woman's understanding of or response to gender-based violence? Such qualitative data are essential to deciphering the micro-level construction of sisterhood.

Invisible Emotional Labor: Reetu Sattar's strategies for persuasion and coordination—such as bridging religious divides or scheduling rehearsals—can only be inferred indirectly. Participant interviews might reveal how "trauma narrative exchanges" fortified collective identity—e.g., whether private conversations during breaks served as emotional outlets.

Uncharted Long-Term Impact: The "ripple effects" of performance art demand longitudinal observation. Have participants translated their experience into community initiatives (e.g., anti-violence advocacy groups)? Have local women's organizations adapted its protest aesthetics? These questions necessitate follow-up fieldwork.

6.2 Potential Oversimplifications in Theoretical Framework

Cross-Cultural Theoretical Adaptation: This study employs Western theoretical frameworks (e.g., Beuys’ “social sculpture”, Barthesian semiotics) to analyze artistic praxis in South Asian contexts, potentially overlooking the distinctiveness of indigenous cultural logics. For instance, do bamboo sticks carry uniform symbolic meanings across Bangladesh’s rural and urban spheres? Does the semiotic tension of saris vary significantly along class lines? Future research must incorporate Bangladeshi aesthetic theories (e.g., resistance traditions in folk art) to address these gaps.

Under-Examined Complexities of Sisterhood: The analysis presupposes that “shared trauma” automatically fosters solidarity, yet material realities of class and religious differences may obstruct affective bonding. Ethnographic research might reveal concrete cases of conflict negotiation (e.g., how Hindu and Muslim participants mediated cultural differences), enabling a more dialectical examination of sisterhood’s construction processes.

6.3 Future Research Directions

Tracing the “Social Life” of Performance Art: Subsequent studies should employ ethnographic methods including field observations, in-depth interviews, and participatory documentation to examine how the performance is memorialized, appropriated, or reconfigured within local communities.

Comparative Analyses: Systematic comparisons be-

tween *Himmati Mai* and other feminist artistic interventions in South Asia (e.g., Pakistan’s “dance protests” or India’s “Red Sari Movement”) could elucidate region-specific aesthetics of resistance.

Digital Ethnographic Supplementation: Investigating the dissemination patterns and viewer commentaries of performance videos across social media platforms would reveal how global audiences interpret this localized protest, thereby facilitating critical examination of transnational feminist solidarity’s possibilities and constraints.

6.4 Concluding Remarks: From Textual Analysis to Engaged Scholarship

The limitations of this study reveal a fundamental challenge in researching artistic activism: theoretical interpretation cannot substitute for grounded, localized experience. Future research must evolve toward “engaged scholarship”, collaborating directly with local artists and participants to transform academic analysis into practical instruments for social change—such as co-creating archival projects documenting sonic protests or developing performance-based therapeutic workshops addressing gender violence. Only through such praxis-oriented approaches can academic inquiry truly resonate with the core ethos of *Himmati Mai*: that art functions not merely as a weapon of critique, but more fundamentally as a formative force for societal reconstruction.

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Research on the Design of Olympic IP Small Commodities Driven by Artificial Intelligence Technology

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Abstract: Objective: In the era of artificial intelligence, aiming at the problems of long design cycle and serious homogenization of Olympic IP small commodities, explore the path of empowering design innovation with artificial intelligence technology. This paper aims to empower the design of Olympic IP small commodities through artificial intelligence technology. Starting from the three perspectives of designers, manufacturing enterprises, and product users, it aims to improve design efficiency and creative level, meet consumers' personalized needs, and promote the spread of Olympic culture.

Method: This paper uses the case analysis method to summarize the possible problems in the design process of Olympic IP small commodities. It is hoped that by constructing an all - process model of empowering Olympic IP small commodities with artificial intelligence technology, a win - win situation for designers, manufacturing enterprises, and product users can be achieved.

Conclusion: Through data-driven and algorithmic generation capabilities, artificial intelligence effectively addresses the efficiency bottlenecks and creative limitations in the design of Olympic IP small commodities. However, the understanding of cultural connotations still requires the guidance of human designers. The empowerment of small commodity design by artificial intelligence technology has improved both design quality and efficiency, providing a reusable method for the design of Olympic IP small commodities.

Keywords: artificial intelligence design; Olympic IP derivatives; human-computer collaboration; design process reconstruction

With the popular breakout of small commodities for the Paris Olympics, Olympic IP small commodities have become a key topic of discussion among people. Olympic IP has huge commercial value. Its wide audience and strong brand appeal bring substantial advertising revenue and brand exposure opportunities to sponsors and broadcasters. The current situation of the small commodity market is vibrant. With the upgrading of consumption and the rise of e-commerce, the demand for personalized and creative small commodities is increasing day by day, and the market potential is enormous. In recent years, the development trend of artificial intelligence technology has been rapid, gradually penetrating into all walks of life. Artificial intelligence technology brings more possibilities to the design of small commodities and promotes industrial innovation and upgrading by improving design efficiency and creative level.

This thesis deeply explores the application of artificial intel-

ligence technology in the design field of Olympic IP small commodities. The aim is to optimize the design process through intelligent means and improve design efficiency and creative level. By deeply tapping the cultural connotation and market potential of the Olympic IP, and combining artificial intelligence technology to achieve personalized and customized design innovation, it can meet the diversified needs of consumers, thereby enhancing the market competitiveness of Olympic IP small commodities. In addition, this research will also provide referable design ideas and methods for related industries, and promote the continuous development and innovation of the Olympic IP small commodity design industry.

1. The current status of the use of artificial intelligence technology in the field of small commodity design and the particularity of the design of small

commodities with Olympic IP

1.1 Olympic IP small commodities

IP (Intellectual Property) originally refers to the property rights enjoyed by the right holder for the achievements of their creative intellectual labor. With the extensive development of the pan-entertainment industry, the connection and integration between small commodity design and Olympic IP have become increasingly prominent, thus forming a new form of IP development. Olympic IP is a cultural symbol with high recognizability, the ability to attract attention on its own, strong cash conversion ability, and a long cash income cycle. Olympic IP aggregates the initial fans with high-quality content, and through cross-media production and dissemination, it exponentially expands the number of fans, and then feeds back to the original IP, realizing the transformation, expansion, and ecologicalization of the value of Olympic IP.

Olympic IP small commodities refer to the small peripheral commodities of the Olympics that have obtained the official authorization of the International Olympic Committee or the event organizing committee, and the product design needs to strictly follow the intellectual property regulations such as Olympic emblems, mascots, and slogans. Olympic IP small commodities include categories such as mascot derivatives, daily cultural and creative products, and limited - edition collectibles. Bing Dwen Dwen plush toy, The plush doll “Phryge” of the Paris Olympics belongs to the category of mascot derivatives. Lightweight products such as keychains, badges, commemorative T - shirts, and thermos cups belong to the category of daily cultural and creative products. The “carbon-neutral La’eeb” and Olympic-themed NFT products fall into the category of limited-edition collectibles.

1.2 Overview of Artificial Intelligence Technology Empowering Small Commodity Design

With the rapid development of science and technology, artificial intelligence technology is infiltrating into all walks of life at an unprecedented speed, and the design field is no exception. With its powerful data processing capabilities and learning algorithms, artificial intelligence is gradually changing the landscape of the traditional design industry. In the field of small commodity design, artificial intelligence technology has changed the traditional product design process and constantly influences producers, designers, and small commodity purchasers. The application of artificial intelligence technology has promoted the development of the small commodity design field, enabling product designers to complete small commodity design more conveniently, helping production enterprises to quickly grasp the hotspots of small commodity design, and meeting the personalized needs of users.

1.3 Advantages of Artificial Intelligence Technology Empowering Small Commodity Design

In the field of small commodity design, artificial intelligence

technology has significantly improved design efficiency and accuracy. By analyzing data, artificial intelligence can automatically generate design plans, and even simulate the performance and appearance of different materials, obtaining a large number of small commodity design results in a short time for designers to choose from. In the early design preparation stage of manufacturing enterprises, artificial intelligence technology can achieve precise and personalized design by capturing and analyzing the data information of existing small commodities in the market. Artificial intelligence technology can also generate customized small commodity styles according to consumers’ preferences, greatly enhancing the user experience and market competitiveness.

In terms of graphic processing, artificial intelligence can assist designers in tasks such as sketch generation, image processing, and style transfer. By leveraging machine learning and generative adversarial networks, artificial intelligence can analyze a large number of design works and images, learn and imitate different design styles, and provide designers with a continuous stream of creative inspiration. Artificial intelligence is highly efficient and accurate in image processing. Whether it is image enhancement, filter effects, color correction, or background removal, artificial intelligence can quickly complete high-quality processing, greatly improving design efficiency.

In terms of user experience, artificial intelligence can accurately predict user needs through data analysis, and optimize the user experience design in this way. Based on the predictions of artificial intelligence, designers can design product interfaces and interaction processes more targeted, thus enhancing user experience satisfaction and loyalty. In terms of voice interaction, artificial intelligence can also use natural language processing and sentiment analysis technologies to interact with users more intelligently and provide more personalized and considerate services.

1.4 Development Prospects of Artificial Intelligence Technology Empowering Product Design

With the continuous advancement of technology, the application prospects of artificial intelligence technology in the design field will be even broader. The development of multi-modal generative artificial intelligence technology will enable artificial intelligence to process various input information such as text, sound, melody, and visual signals, achieving more comprehensive and integrated creative design. The rapid development of artificial intelligence technology also brings challenges such as data security and privacy protection. It requires the joint efforts of all sectors of society to formulate corresponding policies and standards to ensure its healthy development.

In short, artificial intelligence is changing the landscape of the design field at an astonishing pace. From graphic generation in small commodity design to user experience design, the

updates of artificial intelligence technology are driving the innovation and development of the design industry. We have every reason to believe that in the days to come, artificial intelligence technology will bring more exciting possibilities and unlimited room for imagination to the design field.

2. Construction of the Design Model for Olympic IP Commodities Driven by Artificial Intelligence Technology

2.1 Construction of the Full - process Model for the Design of Olympic IP Small Commodities Driven by Artificial Intelligence Technology

With the continuous innovation of artificial intelligence technology, its application in the design of Olympic IP small commodities is increasing day by day. Artificial intelligence plays an important role in the preparation stage, design stage, and redesign stage before design. The following takes the image design process of Paris Olympics IP small commodities as an example to analyze in detail how artificial intelligence technology empowers the design of Olympic IP small commodities.

In the preparatory stage before design, artificial intelligence is involved in the process of collecting design inspiration and materials. Designers use artificial intelligence image recognition technology to quickly screen out elements such as patterns and colors related to the theme of the Paris Olympics from a vast amount of Olympic historical materials, such as the iconic buildings of Paris and the Olympic rings. These elements provide a rich source of inspiration for subsequent designs. At the same time, with the help of the analysis and

organization capabilities of artificial intelligence, designers can quickly organize and classify existing material resources to prepare for subsequent designs. During the design phase, artificial intelligence will be involved in the process of creative generation and plan optimization. After collecting sufficient design materials, artificial intelligence further exerts its creative generation ability. Through deep learning algorithms, artificial intelligence can automatically combine different design elements to generate various image design plans with different styles. Designers then screen and optimize these plans, and finally determine a design that not only conforms to the Olympic spirit but also has market appeal. For example, artificial intelligence can skillfully combine the Eiffel Tower in Paris with the Olympic IP to generate a unique and commemorative design for Olympic IP small commodities. Designers make fine adjustments on this basis to ensure smooth lines and harmonious color matching of the pattern, thus creating a satisfactory finished product.

During the redesign phase, artificial intelligence will be involved in the feedback integration and iterative optimization process. After capturing sales data and user product reviews, artificial intelligence can quickly clean and analyze the data, thus helping designers collect and analyze market feedback. Based on this feedback data, designers can promptly adjust product designs or marketing strategies to meet the ever - changing needs of consumers. When iterative optimization involves the local optimization of Olympic IP small commodities, with the help of artificial intelligence technology, the adjusted renderings can be quickly produced, and this method improves the optimization efficiency. These capabilities to respond quickly to the market not only enhance the market competitiveness of Olympic IP small commodities but also bring greater commercial value to designers and Olympic

Figure 1. Reference image generated by artificial intelligence based on the theme of the Paris Olympics. Image source: www.liblib.art



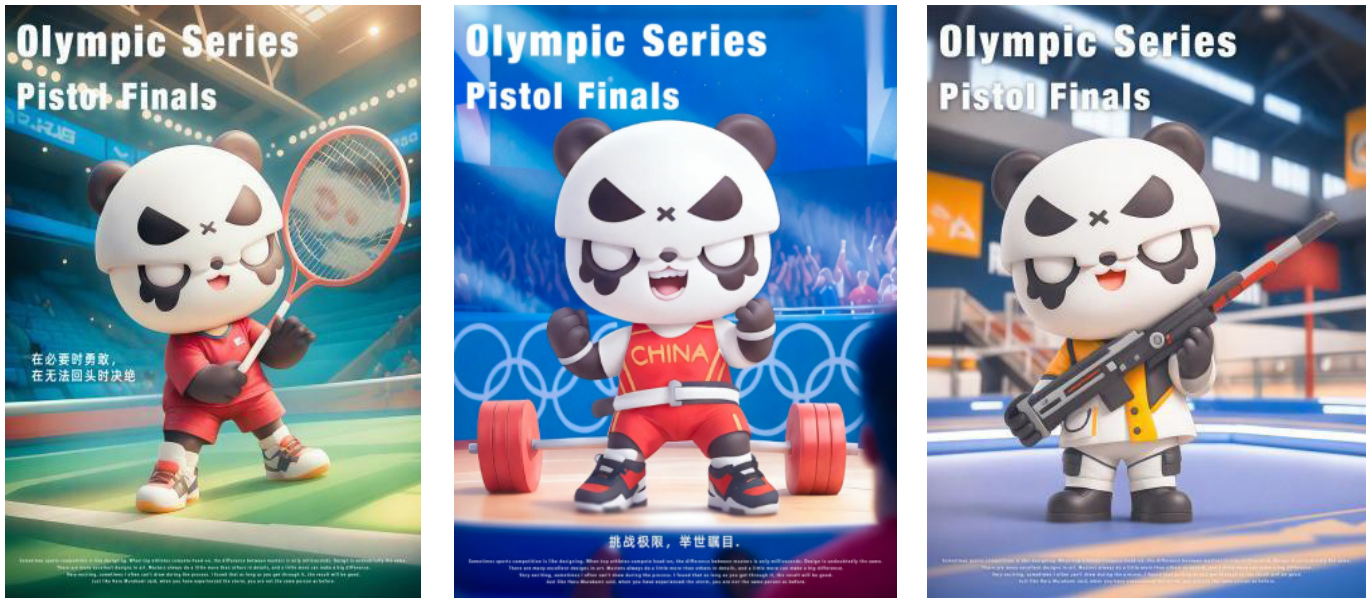


Figure 2. Olympic IP small commodities generated with the help of artificial intelligence. Picture source: www.liblib.art

brands.

2.2 Olympic IP Commodity Design Driven by Artificial Intelligence Technology

In addition to playing a role in different design stages, artificial intelligence also demonstrates powerful capabilities in consumer personalized customization. With the help of artificial intelligence technology, consumers can choose their favorite design elements, colors, sizes, etc. online to customize unique Olympic commemorative badges. This personalized design method not only meets the diverse needs of consumers but also strengthens their emotional connection with the Olympic brand.

At the same time, through the virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies driven by artificial intelligence, consumers can also experience the effect of wearing commemorative badges online, further stimulating their purchasing desire. This innovative interactive approach not only enhances the shopping experience of consumers but also opens up new avenues for the market promotion of Olympic IP small commodities.

In summary, the application of artificial intelligence in the design of Olympic IP small commodities can be involved in every aspect of the design, playing an important role in aspects such as inspiration mining, scheme optimization, personalized customization, and market feedback analysis. With the continuous advancement of technology and the expansion of application scenarios, artificial intelligence will play an even more important role in the design of Olympic IP small commodities in the future, bringing more convenience to designers and consumers.

3. Practical methods for the design of Olympic IP small commodities driven by artificial intelligence technology

3.1 Analysis of the Demand Characteristics of Consumers for Olympic IP Small Commodities

To design Olympic IP small commodities, it is first necessary to conduct market research based on and analyze the demand characteristics of consumers for Olympic IP small commodities. Different consumer groups have certain differences in their demands for Olympic IP small commodities. There are mainly three demands that designers need to consider during the design process: emotional value and emotional resonance, diversified and personalized demands, as well as market hotspots and popular trends.

In terms of emotional value and the need for emotional resonance, designers need to consider that consumers' purchase of Olympic IP small commodities is not only a tribute to athletes and the sports spirit, but also a way to get closer to the Olympic Games and Olympic idols, thus obtaining emotional satisfaction and resonance. Olympic IP small commodities often have unique social attributes. Consumers can share and display these commodities to communicate with others about Olympic topics and enhance social interaction.

In terms of diversified demands, consumers' demands for Olympic IP small commodities show diverse characteristics. Small commodities cover multiple fields such as household items, stationery toys, jewelry gifts, kitchenware, etc. Taking the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as an example, the small commodities sold in the official mall include various products such as Barbie dolls, Hot Wheels, and UNO cards. From small commodities like mascot dolls and cheering sticks to plush toys, T-shirts, and keychains, the types of Olympic IP small

commodities are rich and diverse. In terms of personalized demands, consumers are increasingly inclined to buy Olympic IP small commodities with personalized characteristics. Merchants can print specific blessings, names, or photos on the products according to consumers' requests, making the products more commemorative and personalized.

In terms of market hotspots and popular trends, the design of Olympic IP small commodities needs to closely follow market hotspots and be closely related to the hotspots of Olympic events. Whenever popular athletes or events emerge, related small commodities often become popular items that people like. The guidance of popular trends also has an important impact on Olympic IP small commodities. As part of the fashion trend, the design style, color matching, etc. of Olympic IP small commodities will be affected by popular trends. For example, the dopamine style, Y2K style, macaron color scheme, etc. that have been popular in recent years have all had an important impact on the design of Olympic IP small commodities. Designers and manufacturers need to pay close attention to the changes in fashion trends and adjust product design and production strategies in a timely manner.

The demand characteristics of consumers for small Olympic IP commodities are presented in many aspects, such as emotional value and emotional resonance, consideration of quality and price, diversified and personalized needs, market hotspots and popular trends. Production enterprises and designers need to pay close attention to the changes in these demand characteristics and adjust product design and production strategies in a timely manner to meet the needs of consumers.

3.2 Three Stages of Artificial Intelligence Technology Intervention in Small Commodity Design

The application methods of artificial intelligence technology in different links of small commodity design have extensive examples and far-reaching impacts. The following will introduce in detail the specific application methods of artificial intelligence in links such as data collection, creative generation, and prototype making.

Herbert Alexander Simon proposed in his book *The Sciences of the Artificial* that design is "the action of transforming the existing state into a better one." The core of the preparation stage for designers is problem definition and needs analysis. Designers need to clarify design goals, constraints, and user needs. In the data collection phase, artificial intelligence technology, with its characteristics of high efficiency and precision, is gradually changing our traditional data collection methods. Through intelligent web crawlers, artificial intelligence can quickly capture the data required by designers from a vast amount of online information, whether it is news updates, user reviews, or various market data, all of which can be easily captured by artificial intelligence. In addition, artificial intelligence can also collect environmental data in real-time through various sensors, providing designers with

rich real-time information.

When entering the creative generation stage, the innovative ability of artificial intelligence is even more eye-catching. Artificial intelligence can gain insights into market trends and user needs by deeply analyzing big data, thus pointing out the direction of innovation for designers. At the same time, artificial intelligence can identify potential design rules from historical design cases and current popular trends, providing designers with a continuous stream of innovative inspiration. In addition, artificial intelligence can automatically generate a variety of design solutions based on design parameters and constraints, greatly expanding the creative space of designers.

In the prototyping phase, the role of artificial intelligence technology is equally significant. It can automatically generate design drawings and floor plans based on design goals and parameters, enabling designers to create product prototypes more quickly. At the same time, artificial intelligence can also intelligently recommend the most suitable materials according to project requirements, costs, and sustainability factors, thereby optimizing the product design and manufacturing process. Finally, with the help of AI-supported 3D printing technology, designers can rapidly print physical prototypes for actual testing and user experience evaluation. In this phase, artificial intelligence is involved in the rapid generation of models, the generation of model renderings, and the model optimization process.

Overall, the application of artificial intelligence technology in the design field not only improves the efficiency and quality of design, but also opens up new creative doors for designers. With the continuous advancement of artificial intelligence technology, we have reason to believe that it will exert greater potential in the design field and create more possibilities for us.

3.3 The Integration and Innovative Application of Olympic IP Elements in the Design of Small Commodities Driven by Artificial Intelligence Technology

In today's society, artificial intelligence has become an important tool for promoting innovation in various industries. Especially in the field of design, artificial intelligence technology provides designers with new methods and perspectives. Olympic IP elements are resources with extremely high commercial and cultural value. How to skillfully integrate them into the design of small commodities is a question worthy of study.

The Olympic IP elements are the core components of the Olympic brand image, including the Olympic logo, mascots, etc., with extremely high recognition and commercial value. Incorporating these elements into the design of small commodities can not only enhance the market attractiveness of the products but also effectively spread the Olympic spirit

and culture.

After artificial intelligence intervenes in the design of Olympic IP small commodities, it can use its intelligent recognition and extraction technology to accurately identify and extract the key features of Olympic IP elements, providing designers with precise material references. Designers can also use technologies such as generative adversarial networks to generate creative design plans that combine with Olympic IP elements, providing inspiration for designers. At the same time, artificial intelligence can assist in completing complex pattern design and layout work. With the help of artificial intelligence technology, consumers can participate in the product design process and achieve personalized customization. In addition, artificial intelligence can also provide experiences such as virtual try-ons and interactive games, enhancing consumers' willingness to buy.

With the continuous progress of artificial intelligence technology, the design of Olympic IP small commodities will become more diversified. However, how to ensure that product design plans are in line with the Olympic spirit and brand image, and how to make good use of artificial intelligence technology, still remain challenges that people need to face. The design of Olympic IP small commodities driven by artificial intelligence technology has improved the design level of small commodities, enabling more small commodity buyers to participate in the product design process, and shortening the design cycle of small commodities for enterprises. But producing excellent Olympic IP small commodities with the help of artificial intelligence technology is still a test for designers.

Artificial intelligence technology has great potential in integrating Olympic IP elements into the design of small commodities. Through intelligent integration methods, designers can not only provide consumers with a wider variety of prod-

uct choices, but also further promote the dissemination and development of Olympic culture.

4. Conclusion

At present, the advantages of artificial intelligence lie in the consistency of its generated results and its powerful data organization ability. However, artificial intelligence cannot understand the century-old Olympic spirit behind Olympic IP small commodities. It is precisely this limitation that highlights the irreplaceable value of human designers - only through the joint collaboration of designers and artificial intelligence can we create Olympic IP small commodities rich in cultural memories and warmth. With the further development of generative artificial intelligence technology, the design of Olympic IP small commodities may usher in a more intense paradigm shift. Designers need to safeguard the essence of creativity. True innovation is to break through the limitations of conventional thinking, rather than the processing of data and the reproduction of shapes by algorithms. Historically, every time humans achieve their own development, they cannot do without the support of technology. However, while technology helps humans evolve, it also leads to "technology overload" and the degradation of human nature. Therefore, in the design process, we should give full play to the strengths of artificial intelligence, namely material organization, sketch generation, and scheme combination. At the critical decision-making stage, designers need to evaluate and correct the generated results of artificial intelligence. It can be believed that with the collaboration between designers and artificial intelligence, the design of Olympic IP small commodities will be more high-quality and efficient.

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The wisdom of traditional Chinese creation

Qijun wang

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Under the towering eaves of the Forbidden City, along the winding corridors in the secluded gardens, in the mottled patterns of bronze ware, and in the glaze of ceramic objects, the wisdom of creation of the ancient Chinese people still shines with dazzling brilliance across thousands of years of time and space. From the magnificent architecture to the exquisite arts and crafts, every detail embodies the ancients' awe of nature, love for life, and persistent pursuit of craftsmanship. The crystallization of wisdom of "harmony between man and nature" not only carries the memories of history but also highlights the unique aesthetic concepts and philosophical thoughts of the Chinese nation.

1. Architectural Wisdom

In "Tao Te Ching" (《道德经》), it is said that when

kneading clay to make a vessel, it is precisely because of the "nothingness" in the hollow part of the vessel that the vessel has the function of holding things. When chiseling doors and windows to build a house, it is precisely because of the "nothingness" in the hollow part of the house that the house has the function of providing a place for people to live. This ancient saying summarizes several key elements of architecture: the enclosing walls, doors, and windows. As a physical entity, the space enclosed by architecture is formed simultaneously with the process of architectural construction. The impact of architectural space on the user's psychology directly determines the image of the space in people's minds, which is also the three-dimensional image of the architecture. When a person enters the architectural space, the process from the entrance to the interior of the building is a continuous state of time and space, and only after that can a comprehensive perception of the building be obtained.

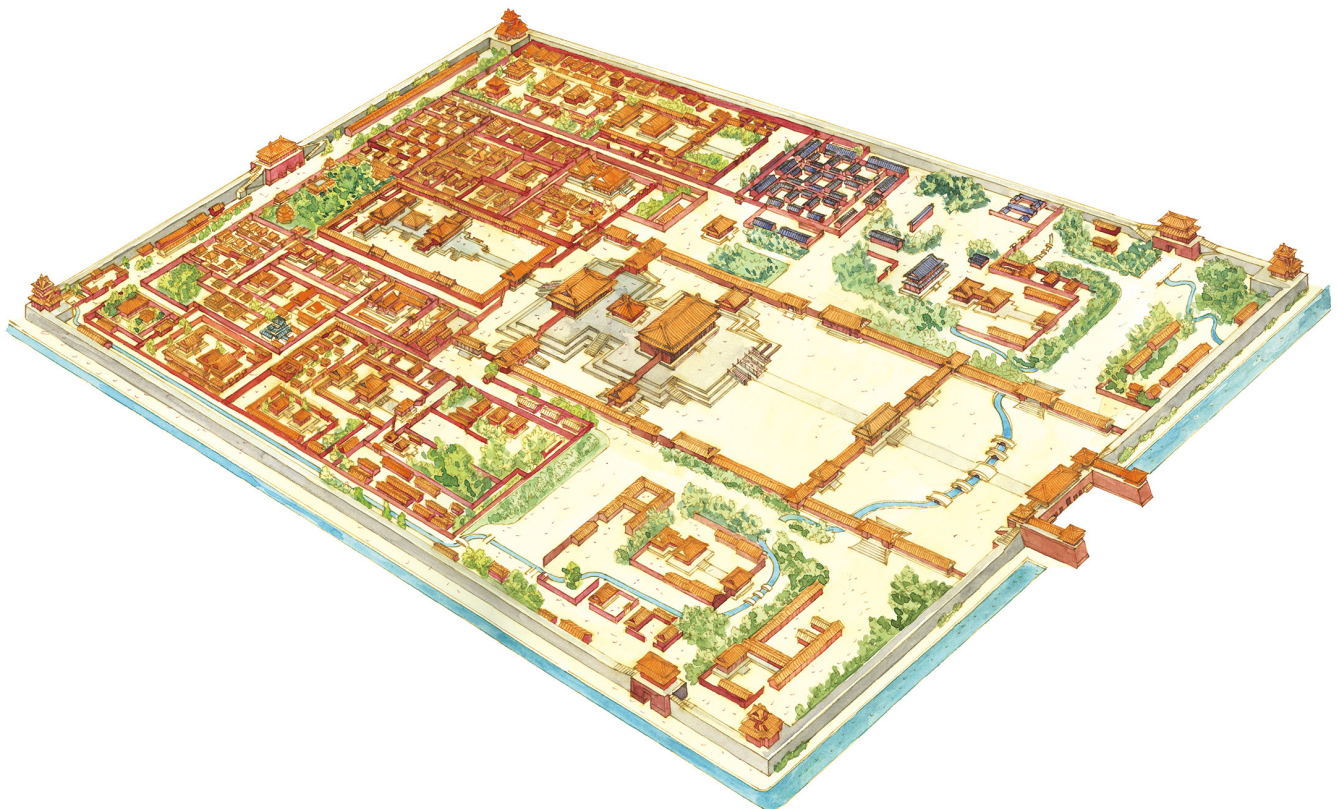


Figure 1. Aerial view of the entire Forbidden City in Beijing

The modeling of traditional Chinese architecture particularly emphasizes the beauty of lines. In single buildings, the contour lines of the roof, the eave corner lines of the eaves, and the brick joint lines of the walls and floors all pay great attention to aesthetics. In group buildings, from the rigorous central axis, the symmetrical layout to the movement route of the building users, they all emphasize the clear distinction between primary and secondary, highlighting the beauty of order. Whether it is the spatial atmosphere of the building itself or the group spatial atmosphere enclosed by the buildings, it is emphasized that the architectural space should create emotional ups and downs along with the changes of people on the timeline and movement route, and finally achieve the ultimate experience in the main building space. For example, the Forbidden City in Beijing. The experience initially starts from the city gate outside the city. From Tiananmen Gate to Wumen Gate, and then to Taihemen Gate, each gate has a different appearance. There are large enough squares between the gates to set off the solemnity created by the gates, making people in it feel their own insignificance and gradually restraining their emotions. Finally, when people pass through Taihemen Gate and the long brick - paved square, climb up the stone steps and come to the front of the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the tall buildings, magnificent decorations and gorgeous colors

convey unrestrained and flamboyant confidence, bringing a deep shock to the visitors, even with a sense of oppression, making people's worship of the hall in front reach a climax.

The wisdom of Chinese architecture lies in that, through the arrangement of various architectural elements, without affecting the usability of the building space, the space can present different images through the ingenious setting of many architectural elements, thus influencing people's perception of the building's dimensions and shaping different architectural styles.

The method of connecting wooden components with mortise and tenon joints has become a fundamental feature of the Chinese timber-framed building system. The fabrication methods of various mortise and tenon joints, including dovetail tenons and dowel tenons, are still in use today. Stilted architecture is one of the important origins of Chinese architecture. The stilted building form, which evolved from tree dwellings, has continuously enhanced people's experience and capabilities in the utilization and processing of wood. Although stilted architecture is not the mainstream of the development of the Chinese building system, it is still one of the important components of the Chinese building system.



Figure 2. The interior of the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City in Beijing

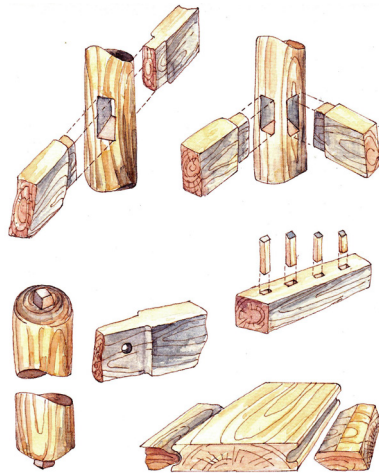


Figure 3. Mortise and tenon structure in the Hemudu Site

The ancient Chinese timber beam - lifting framework structure and construction techniques also developed from this. The upper structure of the timber beam - lifting framework mainly consists of beams set on the north - south columns, among which the beam erected between the front and rear Jin columns (金柱) is the main beam. The most common beam - lifting type roof in Chinese classical architecture is the framework form with four rows of columns in the front and back. There are rarely more than four rows of columns. Even if there are, the method of reducing columns is often used to remove the columns in the middle row to maintain the openness of the indoor space. The bays of the building are formed between the adjacent eave columns on the front of the building. According to the traditional bay scale, the width of the middle bay, that is, the central bay, is the largest, and the widths of the bays on both sides decrease symmetrically. Therefore, in the arrangement of columns, whether it is the arrangement of columns in the east - west direction or the north - south direction, the distance between the two columns of the central bay is the widest.

The “Yingzao Fashi” is the most complete ancient Chinese book on architectural techniques. The book clearly stipulates various design standards, specifications, and relevant materials, construction quotas, and indicators for buildings, aiming to clarify the hierarchical system of housing construction, the artistic forms of architecture, and strict regulations and restrictions on material dimensions. The “Yingzao Fashi” classifies buildings according to the structure and form of the wooden framework. This classification is based on the basic dimensions of wooden components. Once the dimensions of the basic components are determined, the dimensions and material usage of the wooden framework of each part of the entire building, as well as the scale and form of the entire building, can be determined according to the proportions specified in the book.

In the traditional Chinese timber-framed architectural system, although the roof forms of buildings vary greatly, the devel-

opment and changes of the roof slope can be mainly divided into three stages. One is the Han Dynasty (202 BC - 220 AD) and before, where both the main horizontal ridge at the top of the roof and the outlines of the two-slope roof surfaces are in a straight-line form. Another is the Tang and Song dynasties (618 - 1279 AD), when the outlines of the roof surface and the main horizontal ridge at the top both developed into a gentle hyperbolic form. The third is the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368 - 1911 AD), with a more steeply sloping curved outline of the roof surface. The change in this roof shape is caused by the change in the roof truss structure.

The Song - style method follows the order from the roof to the eaves. The lifting heights of each purlin from top to bottom decrease according to a fixed ratio of 1/10, 1/20, 1/40, and 1/80. The reference baseline for this ratio is the connect-

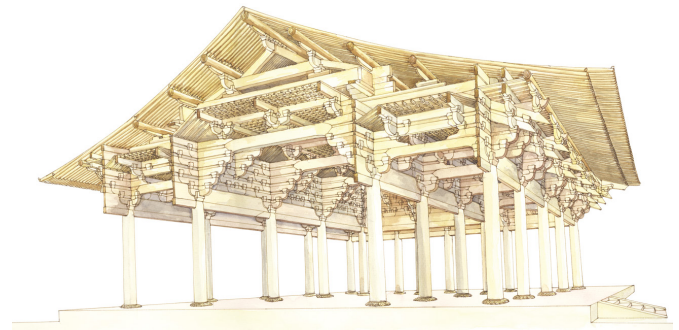


Figure 4. The beam - lifting wooden framework of the Main Hall of Foguang Temple in Wutai Mountain, Shanxi Province

清工部《工程做法》举架图

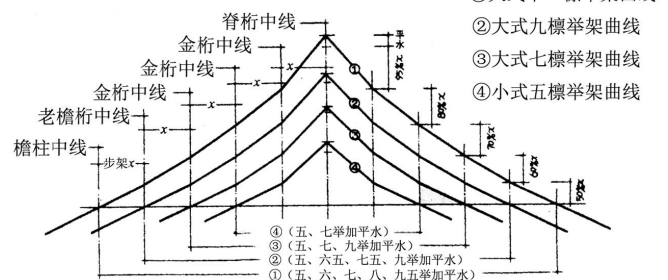


Figure 5. Schematic diagram of the ridge - folding method in the Song Dynasty (from *Treatise on Architectural Methods*)

宋《营造法式》举折图

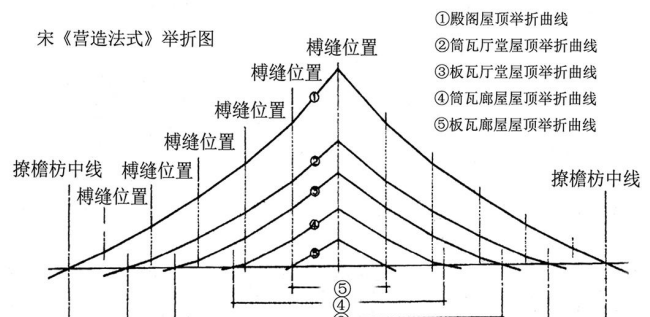


Figure 6. Schematic diagram of the ridge - raising method in the Qing Dynasty (from *Engineering Methods*)

ing line from the first purlin of the bottom layer to the vertex of each purlin. Since this baseline is variable, the lifting height keeps decreasing while the ratio keeps increasing. Therefore, the change in the height of each purlin is relatively small. Except for the obvious depression at the ridge, the downward slope of the roof gradually eases, and finally, an asymmetric inclined - curve roof profile is obtained. In Qing - style architecture, the structure of the entire roof - truss layer is greatly simplified. The columns in the building change to the form of inner columns being higher and eave columns being lower. Taking a row of columns in the depth direction and the beam - frame connected on the columns as a group, a triangular form is formed. A building is composed of multiple sets of beam - frames with a triangular exterior arranged side by side. The space between two triangular beam - frames is a bay. The columns and beam - frames in the building are connected by mortise - and - tenon joints. Dougong (bracket sets) disappear in the structural layer and almost become decorative components on the outer eaves of high - grade buildings.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the large wooden structures were more clearly divided into two major development systems due to the different organizational forms of the beam frames. One is the post-and-lintel structure represented by the official architecture in the north of China, and the other is the chuandou structure(column and tie timber - framework) represented by the residential buildings in a vast area of the south of China.

The architectural image of the chuandou - type wooden structure appeared in the pottery houses unearthed from tombs in the southern region during the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BC - 220 AD). The application of this type of wooden framework was mainly concentrated in civilian buildings, and there were no obvious signs of development thereafter. The chuandou - type wooden structure also uses columns as the main load - bearing structure of the roof. However, there are no beams between adjacent columns in the depth direction of the house. Instead, each purlin is directly placed on the corresponding columns. The height of each row of columns is set to decrease symmetrically from the middle to both sides, forming a two - slope roof form with a high middle and low sides. Each row of columns along the bay and depth direction is connected into a group by a horizontal and vertical flat wooden fang passing through the vertical holes drilled at the same height of each column. This fang that horizontally penetrates between the columns does not play a load - bearing role, but only serves to fix the neat arrangement of a group of columns. The chuandou - type building is an overall structure formed by a framework composed of several groups of multiple columns connected by flat wooden fangs.

The post-and-tie structure uses dense columns as the main load-bearing structure, and the span of the tie beams between the columns is relatively small. Therefore, it is easier to obtain building materials, and people can use relatively thin-di-

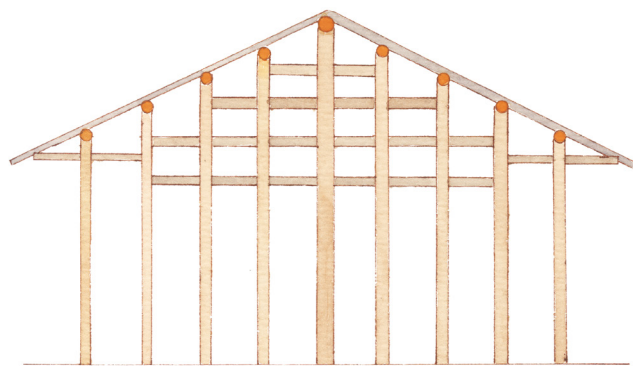


Figure 7. Schematic diagram of the chuandou - style building framework

ameter wood to build large-scale buildings. In many areas of southern China, even in high-grade temple and mansion buildings, post-and-tie structure buildings are still the main type. People only use the Timber-Frame Construction in the main building, and the surrounding area is enclosed by post-and-tie structure buildings. In some cases, only one or several central halls of the building use Timber-Frame Construction, while the other bays still use the post-and-tie structure, forming a mixed house structure of Timber-Frame Construction and post-and-tie structure. In this way, it can meet the functional requirements of having a large space of Timber-Frame Construction and ordinary bays of the post-and-tie structure that saves materials.

2. The Wisdom of Jade Processing

Jade has a long history and profound cultural significance in China and is widely loved and cherished. In China, jade is regarded as a symbol of auspiciousness, nobility, and perfection, capable of bringing good luck and blessings. Therefore, the use of jade and gold to make ornaments and decorative objects also embodies people's yearning for and blessings of beauty. The Chinese people's love for jade stems not only from its aesthetic qualities but also from the profound philosophical thoughts and cultural connotations it carries in Chinese traditions.

The history of the Chinese people's admiration for jade can be traced back to the Neolithic Age, which is seven or eight thousand years ago. People first made and used jade as ritual vessels for worshipping gods. When people wear jade, they not only pursue its decorative effect, but also have the wish to pray for the blessing of the gods.

During the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties (around 2070 BC - 256 BC), jade articles were endowed with political and cultural significance. Besides being used as ritual vessels and burial objects, they began to be more commonly used as daily ornaments by the Chinese imperial family and nobles. As recorded in "The Book of Rites", "A gentleman does not part with jade without good reason", which means that under



Figure 8. Jade chest and abdomen pendants of the Western Zhou Dynasty

normal circumstances, a gentleman should wear jade ornaments at all times. However, the jade mentioned here is not the jade pendant of later generations, but a set of accessories. It was hung in front of the chest and abdomen, and could hang down to the legs. The chest and abdomen accessories unearthed from the Western Zhou Dynasty were made up of jade rings, various curved and straight jade tubes of different sizes, agates, jet, and many other components of different materials strung together. The most complex ones were composed of hundreds of components. Not only were there many components, but the combination was also delicate. When these components strung together were worn on a person, they would collide with each other and make sounds as the person moved. Therefore, the wearer was required to move slowly and not make large - amplitude movements. Wearing a set of jade ornaments not only demonstrated one's status but also served to regulate behavior and maintain an elegant posture. Thus, it initiated the precedent of using ornaments to regulate people's actions, which was inherited by successive dynasties. It can be said to be the wisdom of the ancients in wearing jade.

During the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907 AD), jade mainly had two sources. One was Yutian jade transported through tributary offerings, which is the jade produced in the current Hotan area of Xinjiang. The other was the jade offered as tribute from various places, such as Min jade offered as tribute from the current Henan, Lantian jade from Shaanxi, Xiuyan jade from Liaoning, and Dushan jade from Nanyang, Henan. Hotan jade has a warm and moist texture with almost no impurities, but it is difficult to obtain, so it was regarded as precious. Historical records once stated that due to insufficient supply during the Tang Dynasty, Min jade was once used as a substitute for the ritual jade used by the royal family. Many classic works of the Tang Dynasty recorded jade products, but the jade described in these works might not be real jade, and it also included other stones of good quality. The "Tang Que Shi" recorded that the jade statues of emperors of past dynasties set up in the Taiqing Palace of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty were actually white stones from Taibai Mountain as verified. It was just because the stone had a fine and flawless texture and resembled beautiful jade.

During the Song Dynasty (960 - 1270 AD), the royal court established the "Jade Workshop" to specifically produce jade articles. These articles ranged from national ritual vessels to decorative heads for daily walking sticks and various ornaments, demonstrating a high level of craftsmanship. The carved patterns were more complex and exquisite. Since the problem of tight jade resources had not been completely resolved at that time, craftsmen began to make up for it through technical means. Some jade materials with slight flaws in quality were utilized to carve delicate ornaments. Craftsmen carved corresponding shapes according to the color changes of the jade, thus creating jade products with rich colors and exquisite carvings.

The Yuan Dynasty (1271 - 1368 AD) was the dynasty with the most extensive territory in Chinese history. It resolved the issue of the source of jade materials from Xinjiang at one stroke, and the jade production in other regions also increased significantly. During this period, jade products were relatively large in size and rich in variety. The Dushan Great Jade Sea, currently located in Beihai Park in Beijing, is a jade urn carved from a single piece of green jade. It is said to be a utensil used by Kublai Khan to hold wine and entertain his ministers when the Yuan Dynasty was first established. This jade urn is the largest ancient palace jade article discovered in China so far. It is 0.62 meters high, with the mouth rim and base slightly retracted inward, the abdomen protruding outward, the maximum perimeter of 4.93 meters, the abdominal wall thickness of about 0.12 meters, and the total weight of over 1 ton.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the supply of jade materials and the conditions for processing and carving had matured. Jade carvings and jade products were widely used in both the imperial court and the folk. As a result, the shapes,

categories, and styles of jade products became extremely rich. Small - sized jade ornaments pursued exquisiteness and could also be combined with gold, silver, etc. to form magnificent objects. For example, a gold - supported jade jue unearthed from the Dingling Mausoleum of the Ming Dynasty had a delicately carved jade jue as the main body, but the bottom was a gold tray with dragon patterns. Moreover, the tray was inlaid with various colored gemstones for decoration, demonstrating the superb level of carving and inlaying techniques. It also made the white jade appear more noble against the backdrop of gold and gemstones.

The Ming Dynasty completed the development history of jade from the royal family and nobles to the common people.



Figure 9. Gold - inlaid jade jue of the Ming Dynasty

Jade began to become a decorative material that attracted the attention of the whole society. Besides daily accessories, a large number of antique - style jade shapes also emerged. In terms of processing techniques, there was a polarization between the pursuit of simplicity and the pursuit of decoration. Jade materials were also combined with more other materials to form various distinctive decorations.

3. Ingenious Gold and Silver Ware

The smelting, processing and manufacturing of gold and silver ware require a relatively high level of technical expertise, and the sources of materials are limited. Since ancient times, gold and silver have been symbols of wealth and power. In the early days, gold and silver ware were almost exclusively used by the imperial family and nobles. In traditional Chinese culture, gold and silver products were often used to make ritual vessels. Gold and silver were widely used in the mag-

nificent palaces and sacrificial items of the imperial court, the essential jewelry and dowry in folk weddings, the Buddha statues and alms bowls in Buddhism, and the elixir refined in the alchemy furnaces of Taoism. Therefore, gold and silver are not only a form of material wealth and a symbol of power, but also carriers of etiquette, religion, art, and spirit, bearing rich connotations of traditional Chinese culture.

The simplest method of making goldware is casting, also known as mold casting. It is a technique in which gold or silver is melted into liquid and then cast into objects using molds. The gold hairpin unearthed from the Shang Dynasty (circa 1600 BC - circa 1046 BC) tomb in Liujiahe, Beijing, is the earliest known gold casting in China, confirming that China had mastered the smelting and casting techniques of goldware more than 3,000 years ago.



Figure 10. Gold mask from Sanxingdui

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770 BC - 221 BC), social changes led to an increase in the shapes and types of gold and silver wares. The emergence of gold and silver vessels and the increase in silver wares were particularly eye - catching. The processing level of gold and silver at this time was quite superb, represented by the inlaying gold and silver technique. The principle of the inlaying gold and silver technique is to inlay two or three kinds of metals on the surface of the object. Through the contrast of the lusters of different metals, the patterns are revealed and highlighted, so as to achieve the purpose of beautifying the object. The use of the inlaying gold and silver technique on bronze ornaments began in the middle of the Spring and Autumn period, became popular in the Warring States period, and gradually declined after the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC - 8 AD). During the Western Han Dynasty, the combination of gold and silver had been applied to the decoration of more daily utensils. In the inlaid gold and silver cloud - patterned rhinoceros statue of the Western Han Dynasty, the delicate gold and silver lines lingered around the rhinoceros like clouds, which was very exquisite.



Figure 11. Bronze rhinoceros zun with gold and silver inlaid cloud patterns of the Western Han Dynasty

In the manufacturing process of gold and silver wares in the Tang Dynasty, the techniques of hammering and chasing had developed to a stage of mature application. The vast majority of gold and silver wares unearthed from archaeological sites in the Tang Dynasty were formed by hammering, which fully demonstrates its great influence. Gold and silver wares processed by hammering can present a relief effect on the surface, enriching the forms of expression of gold and silver wares. Therefore, in the production of gold and silver, which are soft in texture and precious, it is a simple, efficient and material - saving method, and is very popular in gold and silver processing everywhere.

Silver wares after hammering can also be further decorated by gilding, creating a gorgeous image of the combination of gold and silver. In addition, gold and silver after hammering can be combined with other forms of decoration, such as inlaying precious stones, to form a gorgeous and prominent decoration.

Engraving, also known as carving, is a further processing technique carried out after the object is formed. Whether it is gold, silver, or copper plates, in traditional operations, the scraps are melted, impurities are removed, and cast into ingots. Then, it is repeatedly heated and hammered to become suitable sheet materials. Engraving can carve patterns on the flat surface of the sheet, or “chisel” away the area around the pattern to create a relief effect. It is a fine metal processing technique mainly used for carving patterns and decorative patterns on the surface of gold and silverware. A pair of engraved silver boots were unearthed from a Liao Dynasty tomb in Inner Mongolia. The silver sheet used to make these boots is only 0.5 millimeters thick, and it is engraved with flying phoenix and bird patterns. The cloud patterns transformed from the bird feathers cover the entire boot body, and these patterns are all gilded.

Welding is commonly used in various metal processing techniques. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, small - area, refined and precise gold brazing tech-



Figure 12. Carved silver boots of the Liao Dynasty

nology emerged and was quickly applied to jewelry. For the welding agents of ancient gold and silver wares, borax, tian-mingsha (a kind of traditional Chinese medicine material), or rosin could be used. There were also records of using halogen salts and brine. Sometimes, gold and silver were directly used to avoid corrosion and discoloration at the welded parts.

In the processing techniques of gold and silver products, there is an even more elaborate and complicated processing method called “bian lei”, which is a kind of braiding technique. This is a very delicate metal processing technology. Taking advantage of the excellent ductility of gold and silver, the gold and silver are first processed into extremely thin wires, and then the gold and silver wires are used to make gold and silver wares with complex shapes through techniques such as braiding, piling, and stacking. According to different braiding techniques, it can be divided into two categories: flat “bian lei” and three-dimensional “bian lei”. Flat “bian lei” uses gold and silver wires as thin as hair, which are coiled and welded to form various patterns. For three-dimensional “bian lei”, it is first necessary to use charcoal to shape into the shapes of three-dimensional figures, birds, beasts, or utensils. Then, gold and silver wires are coiled around these charcoal molds. The charcoal molds covered with gold and silver wires are placed in the fire for firing. After the charcoal molds are burned out, what remains are three-dimensional gold and silver ornaments or gold and silver wares.

4. Luxurious Lacquerware

The production of lacquerware is a craftsmanship that embodies the traditional Chinese concept of harmony between man and nature. It is also a process of remaking natural materials into luxurious and beautiful items through processing techniques. What makes the processing of lacquerware different from that of other materials is that the production and processing of lacquerware have characteristics such as numerous process steps, complex craftsmanship, and long

time consumption. Moreover, due to the natural properties of lacquer, every step from lacquer collection, lacquer production to lacquer application needs to be carried out under specific temperature and humidity conditions according to different seasons and climates to obtain the best lacquerware products. For example, for the simplest lacquer application, it is necessary to apply dozens to hundreds of layers of lacquer on the body repeatedly. Each layer must be allowed to dry in the shade under specific temperature and humidity conditions before the next layer can be applied, which requires extremely high time and labor costs.



Figure 13. Gilt - bronze high - footed bowl with baby - playing patterns of the Ming Dynasty

According to Chinese archaeological findings, as early as the Neolithic period, there was already the practice of applying paint on the surface of pottery pots. Wooden objects with painted patterns were also unearthed from the Yinxu ruins in Anyang, Henan. It can be seen that lacquerware has a long history in China. Before making lacquerware, it is generally necessary to prepare the object to be initially coated with paint and determine the initial shape of the lacquerware, which is called the base. In the early days, the most common bases were wooden bases and a small amount of bamboo bases. Later, with the improvement of the craftsmanship level, there were also gold and silver bases, porcelain bases. Different materials can be selected as the inner base according to the shape and use of the object.

In addition, there is also a kind of jiazhu (cloth-wrapped) carcass. For the jiazhu carcass, first, a shape is made of wood or clay as the inner mold. Then, multiple layers of linen or silk are attached to the inner mold, and lacquer is applied layer by layer. After it dries and solidifies, the inner mold is removed, leaving only the jiazhu carcass, which is called the “lost-wax method”. This method can greatly reduce the weight

of the lacquerware and is used to make large-scale statues. Craftsmen utilize the stability, easy carving, and coloring characteristics of lacquerware to create vivid Buddha statues. They also take advantage of the anti-corrosion and easy preservation properties of lacquer products to ensure the integrity and stability of the Buddha statues. The sitting statue of Master Jianzhen made of jiazhu lacquer in the Tang Dynasty is 84 centimeters high, decorated with colored lacquer. Master Jianzhen is wearing a kasaya, with his eyes closed, a faint smile on his lips, and his hands folded on his knees. It shows the solemn appearance of the eminent monk at the time of his passing, as real and vivid as a living person. This lacquer statue of Master Jianzhen has been enshrined by people to this day. The Buddha statues made by the jiazhu lacquer method are light and easy to move, so they have become a very common form of Buddha statue in Chinese history.



Figure 14. Gilt - lacquer jiazhu statue of the bodhisattva

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the production of lacquerware became a specialized industry. The fineness of the lacquer craftsmanship improved. Besides the early wooden cores, new core forms such as bamboo - woven cores also emerged. The lacquerware industry became an important source of national economic income. Therefore, the production scale was large and the development was very prosperous. In addition to daily utensils, large - scale and exquisite lacquer artworks began to be made, and the pattern decorations on the surface of the lacquerware became more meticulous and complex.



Figure 15. Square dou with phoenix - pattern of the Warring States Period

During the Qin Dynasty (221 BC - 207 BC), lacquer, as an important economic resource, was widely used. The flesh color on the faces of the Terracotta Warriors was also primed and decorated with large amounts of lacquer. The lacquer craftsmanship of the Qin Dynasty inherited the legacy of the Warring States period but was more standardized. The “marking the name of the craftsman on the product” system emerged, which improved product quality. The Qin Dynasty highly esteemed the color black, so the most representative lacquerware had black backgrounds with red patterns, and the common patterns were various variants of the divine bird pattern.

The lacquer craft in the Han Dynasty was characterized by large production scale, complete variety, and exquisite craftsmanship. Moreover, the production areas of lacquerware became more extensive, making it a heyday for the development of lacquerware. A large number of sets of daily - use lacquerware emerged. In terms of decoration, many new craftsman-

ship techniques were pioneered, such as multi - color painting, needle - carving, copper - binding, gold - leaf pasting, tortoiseshell - piece inlaying, inlaying, and piled - lacquer.

On some lacquerware, the needle - carving technique was used, that is, patterns were carved on the undried paint film with a awl or needle. This technique emerged during the Warring States period and was further developed in the Han Dynasty. Due to the preservation conditions of constant temperature, constant humidity, anoxic and aseptic in the Mawangdui Han Tombs in Changsha, Hunan, a large number of lacquerware were extremely well - protected. Although more than two thousand years have passed, they can still remain shiny after being unearthed.

The prosperity of the economy, culture and the strength of the national power in the Tang Dynasty directly promoted the development of the lacquerware craftsmanship. In terms of technology, the gold - and - silver inlaying technique was widely used at this time. This is a craftsmanship that combines lacquer - painting and metal inlaying. As early as the Shang Dynasty, people had already tried to decorate lacquerware with gold - and - silver foil appliqué. After continuous application and experimentation over a long period of time, the mature gold - and - silver inlaying technique was formed in the Tang Dynasty.



Figure 16. Secret - color porcelain and pingtuo lacquer bowl of the Tang Dynasty

Craftsmen applied various decorative patterns and pieces made from gold and silver foil onto the surface of lacquerware, then applied multiple layers of lacquer. After the lacquer dried, they carried out fine polishing to reveal the gold and silver floral pieces beneath the lacquer layer, thus creating the “gold and silver inlay” technique. The gold and silver

patterns formed by this decorative method could be level with the lacquer surface or protrude above it, creating a three-dimensional pattern effect. Objects decorated with the inlay technique have been unearthed from the underground palace of Famen Temple in the Tang Dynasty. Moreover, due to the development of porcelain, during the Tang Dynasty, there also emerged a decorative form of secret-color porcelain with gold and silver inlay on lacquer, combining the decoration of lacquer with objects of more different materials. For example, lacquer was used as a decorative material for the back of bronze mirrors, with mother-of-pearl and gold and silver inlays on the lacquer layer. In addition, many institutions, including the Palace Museum in China, have in their collections an ancient musical instrument from the Tang Dynasty, the guqin. Most of these guqins are made of wood with a lacquer layer on the outside, and mother-of-pearl, gold and silver decorations are added to the lacquer layer. They have been preserved to this day due to the stable properties and excellent anti-corrosion of the lacquer.

During the Song and Yuan dynasties, monochromatic lacquerware was the main type, but many lacquerware pieces with decorative patterns have also been unearthed nowadays. The carving lacquer technique in the Yuan Dynasty had a profound influence on the Ming and Qing dynasties. The characteristic of Yuan Dynasty objects is that the piled lacquer is relatively thick, and then the decorative patterns are carved with knife techniques. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the production of lacquerware further developed in terms of both production scale and processing techniques. Distinctive lacquerware processing techniques emerged in various places, such as Beijing carved lacquer, Yangzhou mother-of-pearl inlay, and Fujian bodiless lacquerware, each with its own unique features.



Figure 17. Lacquer-backed mirror inlaid with mother-of-pearl figures, flowers and birds of the Tang Dynasty

The technique of carved lacquer already emerged as early as the Tang Dynasty and reached maturity during the Yuan Dynasty. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, carved lacquer was a special lacquerware for the royal family, and the royal court carried out specialized production and processing. As a result, the carved lacquerware of this period was very high in terms of quantity, quality, and craftsmanship value. For making carved lacquer objects, the lacquer layers are generally relatively thick, with at least dozens of layers and at most three to five hundred layers. When making, after the lacquer layers are applied, the craftsman first designs the image on the surface of the lacquer layer, and then carves it with a knife to form relief-like patterns. Finally, the patterns are polished. Carved lacquer can be divided into many varieties according to the different colors of the lacquer. Natural lacquer is used, and vermilion lacquer is the most common, called “Tihong” (carved red). There are also “Tihuang” (carved yellow), “Tilü” (carved green), “Tixi” (carved rhinoceros-pattern) and so on.



Figure 18. Stacked red plate with the pattern of «The Second Ode on Red Cliff» of the Southern Song Dynasty

In addition to carving, there is also the practice of directly painting decorative patterns on the surface of lacquerware. According to different techniques, it is divided into two techniques: lacquer tracing and oil tracing. Lacquer tracing is to paint patterns on a plain lacquer ground with various colored lacquers. Oil tracing, also known as brocade tracing, uses tung oil instead of lacquer to prepare various bright colors and paint patterns on the lacquer layer. During the Pre-Qin period, all lacquerware was painted with colored lacquer. After oil paint appeared in Han Dynasty lacquerware, the use of oil paint gradually increased, making the colors of lacquerware more gorgeous and colorful. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the use of oil paint on lacquerware was quite common. Lacquerware traced with lacquer pays great attention to

the quality of the lacquer base. In order to prevent the lacquer base from cracking and ensure the long-term preservation of the lacquerware, gauze is cut according to the size of the carcass and pasted on the wooden carcass with raw lacquer. Then a coating, which is called “lacquer base” in the jargon, needs to be applied to the lacquerware. After applying putty made by mixing raw lacquer and various seasonings, the carcass is coated with lacquer. Then it is polished and dried in the shade to form plain lacquerware. Finally, the craftsman paints patterns on the plain lacquer ground with various colored lacquers. Oil tracing uses tung oil instead of lacquer to prepare various bright colors and paint patterns. The patterns and designs traced with lacquer are all painted by craftsmen, so it is closest to the effect of painting. Although the patterns are in a flat form, various images can be depicted very delicately and realistically. Moreover, the use of oil paint can also make the pattern designs colorful and prominent. It can be used together with other decorative techniques such as carved lacquer, or only lacquer tracing can be used to obtain rich and colorful patterns.

5. Porcelain Combining Rationality and Romance

Porcelain is a product of the combination of rationality and romance, which is determined by its characteristics. The porcelain embryo is made by configuring materials such as porcelain clay, kaolin, and quartz in different proportions. The glaze and color materials of porcelain also need to follow strict mixing ratios to obtain the desired chroma, brightness, and glaze layer thickness. Porcelain with different functions has relatively fixed shapes. In particular, some classic shapes such as plum blossom vases and yuhuchun vases have been continuously adjusted during use over thousands of years. They are the optimal shapes that conform to usage habits, with strict proportional relationships or composition rules. These are the parts that must be strictly followed during production and cannot be freely improvised.

When making porcelain, there is also a corresponding proportional relationship between the size and thickness of the porcelain blank to ensure the stability during firing and the practicality of the finished product, and it cannot be changed casually. The firing of porcelain is an extremely technical job that strictly controls the temperature. Different types of porcelain have different firing temperatures. High - temperature porcelain such as blue - and - white porcelain needs to be stabilized within a relatively high temperature range to obtain a fine and hard texture. For over - glaze colors like famille rose, when firing the colors for the second time, it should be fired at a relatively low temperature to ensure a bright - colored glaze.

Since porcelain emerged during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25 - 220 AD), it has developed in successive dynasties. It reached a peak of development especially during the Ming



Figure 19. Blue - and - white jade - pot - spring vase with intertwined peony patterns of the Yuan Dynasty

and Qing dynasties. In the long process of development, the manufacturing techniques of porcelain gradually took shape. It needs to go through several major steps such as clay shaping, trimming, glazing, and firing. However, each step contains complex and elaborate procedures, and each procedure has relatively high technical requirements.

For example, in the last step of porcelain production, the firing process. After solving the problems of the kiln and fuel, what people need to solve is how to prevent the objects being fired from being smoked and their surfaces contaminated by the smoke in the kiln. Before the porcelain embryo is completely fired, its surface is prone to be stained with impurities

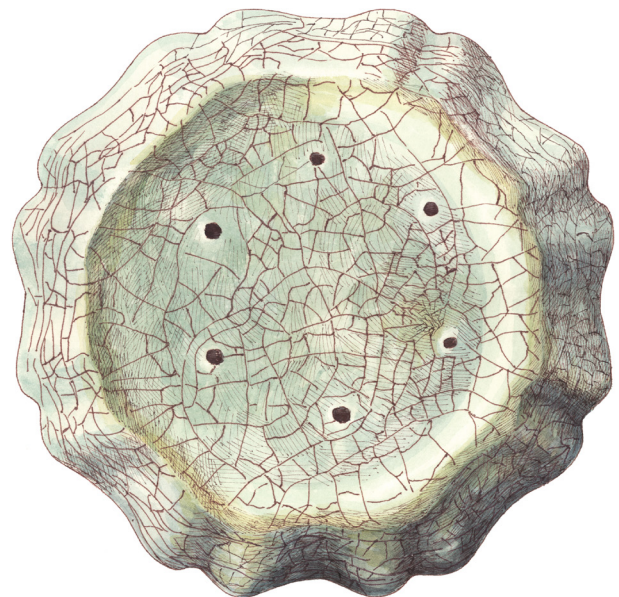


Figure 20. Trace of nail - support at the bottom of the gray - blue glazed petal - mouthed washer of the Southern Song Dynasty

and smoke generated in the kiln during the firing process, making it impossible to obtain a perfect surface of the ware. Therefore, the ancients invented the saggar. A saggar is a circular - shaped flat - bottomed box made of refractory materials such as sand. The objects to be fired are placed in the saggar for protection before firing.

The wisdom of the ancients was also reflected in the invention of “nail supports”. In order to keep the porcelain and the glaze layer intact, there must be something that can prevent the glaze of the object from connecting with the saggar. This is how “nail supports” came into being. In order to maximize the coverage of the porcelain glaze on the surface of the porcelain, nail supports are generally used at the bottom of the porcelain to separate the object from the saggar. Only then can the object be fully covered with glaze. After the object is fired and taken out of the kiln, gently knock off a few nail supports, and only a few small unglazed black dots will be left on the porcelain object.

In addition to some regular shapes, there are also some irregular porcelain shapes. Even from the perspective of people today, these shapes are still innovative and peculiar. For example, the reverse-flow pot needs to be turned upside down to fill water from the bottom. Water is poured in through the plum blossom-shaped small holes at the bottom of the pot, and these holes are connected to the central conduit. There are two conduits designed inside the pot. One is the central conduit, and the other is the conduit connected to the spout. When the pot is filled with water or wine and then placed upright, since the upper end of the central conduit is higher than the liquid level in the pot, the water or wine will not leak out from the small holes at the bottom, achieving a sealing effect.



Figure 21. Celadon - glazed engraved handle - lifting and reverse - flowing pot of the Yaozhou Kiln in the Five Dynasties

When it is necessary to pour out the liquid in the pot, just tilt the spout slightly, and the liquid will flow out from the spout. Since the conduit connected to the spout extends below the liquid level, it can ensure the smooth pouring of the liquid.

The design of the handle reverse-flow pot not only ingeniously utilizes the principle of the communicating vessel in technology but also embodies a philosophy, that is, “inversion is uprightness, and uprightness is inversion”, implying the relativity and convertibility of things and encouraging people to think from different perspectives. The design of the handle reverse-flow pot is a perfect combination of ancient science and technology and art, demonstrating the ancient craftsmen’s profound understanding and application ability of natural laws, and also containing rich traditional Chinese philosophical thoughts.

6. Noble Bronze Ware

In the Longshan Culture sites dating back 4,000 to 4,500 years ago in China, small bronze items have been discovered. Mr. An Zhimin proposed in “On the Early Bronze Ware in China” (Archaeology, 1993) that China’s early bronze ware should have entered China through the prehistoric “Silk Road”. In recent years, Mr. Liu Xuetang (in “The Origin and Spread of Early Bronze Ware in China”, Cultural Relics of Central China, 2012) and other scholars also hold this view. He believes that there is a large amount of arsenic bronze in the early bronze ware in northwest China, and there is an origin relationship between arsenic bronze and Western copper smelting technology. The international academic community generally believes that bronze ware originated in the areas of Turkey and Iran, and then spread throughout the world. These views are also controversial in the academic community, but this article will not elaborate too much on this issue.

The scientific and technological development of the Chinese nation has always been connected with the world. The acceptance and learning of foreign technologies and new things by the ancient Chinese may have far exceeded the perception of people today. During the long historical development process, foreign crafts and technologies have continuously spread to China. After the active learning and improvement of Chinese artisans, they have combined with Chinese traditional crafts, techniques, and culture to become technologies and crafts with Chinese characteristics. Similarly, the export of Chinese culture and technologies has also gone through the same process. Chinese crafts and technologies have continuously spread abroad and combined with local cultures and technologies in different regions, forming another kind of new local works and new cultures.

Bronze is an alloy of copper, tin, lead and other metal elements, and it is a product of the immature ancient smelting technology. This early copper-tin alloy has a significant fea-



Figure 22. Square zun with four sheep of the Shang Dynasty



Figure 23. Schematic diagram of the process of casting bronze zhi with clay piece - molds

ture that its hardness far exceeds that of pure copper. Therefore, before the Iron Age, bronze wares assumed many functions of metal utensils. After being cast, bronze wares present a bright yellow color with a metallic texture. One can imagine the gorgeous and shiny image of them placed on the altar. After being corroded, this alloy product will show a bright powder green color. That's why when these bronze products are unearthed, they are named "blue-green copper".

The production of bronze wares is mainly represented by two methods: the piece-mold casting method and the lost-wax casting method. The piece-mold casting method of bronze wares can be further divided into the integral casting method and the separate casting method. The integral casting method is the overall pouring method. Clay is used to make a mold according to the style of the bronze ware to be made, which is called a model or a mold. In the past, generally one mold was used to cast one item. When the bronze ware was poured, the model was destroyed. The integral casting method uses the methods of movable block molds, movable block patterns, and slotting and core setting. A large number of copper core supports are used during casting to better ensure the regularity and stability of the bronze ware casting mold. The advancement of the replication technology enables the model of a certain type of utensil to be reused, achieving the effect that the shapes, sizes, and decorative patterns of multiple utensils are exactly the same. And this technology is very common in the physical bronze wares unearthed from large and medium-sized tombs and hoards discovered in various places, indicating the progress of Western Zhou bronze wares compared with previous dynasties.

The model casting method is a traditional casting technique, and its process is as follows: Model Shaping: First, use clay to shape the basic form of the bronze ware. Carve the outline of the sunken bronze ware patterns on the prepared clay model. The raised parts are made separately and then pasted onto the surface of the clay model. After casting, these patterns will present a relief effect opposite to the patterns on the clay. Mold Making: Press the well - blended fine - textured clay tightly onto the surface of the clay model, and after patting, the shape and patterns of the clay model will be imprinted on the clay pieces in reverse. Closing the Mold: Divide the turned - over clay pieces into several parts, take them down and fire them into pottery. Such a model is hard and not easy to deform, called a pottery mold. Assemble the pottery molds to form the outer cavity of the utensil, called the outer mold. In addition to the outer mold, a core support is also needed. Its shape is relatively simple. Just make an inner core of pottery or copper with a slightly smaller size according to the established utensil pattern. When the outer mold and the inner core support are installed in place, the next process can be carried out. Pouring: Pour the molten copper into the clay mold. After the molten copper solidifies, break the inner and outer molds or take out the core support, and the bronze ware to be cast can be obtained. The final processes are polishing

and finishing: The surface of the newly - cast bronze ware is rough, and the patterns are not clear. It needs to be polished and finished to become an exquisite bronze ware.

Bronze wares made by the piece-mold casting method are relatively simple in shape and generally regular in decoration. This is determined by the mold-making process. However, this method cannot meet the demand for making more elaborate bronze products. Therefore, the lost-wax casting method came into being.

The lost-wax casting method is a more precise casting method. Its process is as follows:

First, carve the wax mold. Use paraffin wax or beeswax that is easy to melt to make a wax model of the casting. Then, pour a thin layer of mud slurry over the wax model to harden it into a clay mold. Second, fire the clay mold. After air-drying the clay mold, fire it into a ceramic mold. The wax will melt as the temperature rises and flow out through the pre-reserved holes, thus forming a cavity in the ceramic mold. Third, pour the molten alloy liquid into the cavity of the ceramic mold. In this way, delicate patterns with complex designs, even hollow-out patterns, can be made. Finally, polish. Carefully remove the ceramic mold, polish and beautify the bronze ware after demolding. Sometimes, colored decorations are also applied to obtain the final exquisite finished product.

From the perspective of modern related manufacturing techniques, the lost-wax method enables any metal to reproduce the appearance of the wax mold completely and faithfully, so it can create very delicate three-dimensional patterns. The Cloud Pattern Table unearthed in 1978 from a Chu tomb in Xiasi, Xichuan County, Henan Province, dating back to the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC - 476 BC), is actually equivalent to a modern wine table. It is a rectangular body with a length of just over 1 meter. The front, back, left, right sides of the body and the perimeter of the tabletop are all composed of copper stems of different thicknesses, with openwork curly grass patterns on them. These copper stems are divided into five layers, but the total thickness is less than 5 centimeters. The innermost layer uses thicker copper stems as beams, crisscrossing each other. On both sides of each beam, there are multiple branch stems extending out, just like naturally growing vines. The branch vines of each layer curl and twine around each other. They are independent and not connected to each other, and the entire structure is supported by the thickest layer of copper stems in the inner layer. The inner copper stems are connected in layers, with different heights. There are twelve copper monsters climbing around the body of the Cloud Pattern Table, and there are 12 tiger-shaped feet under the table to support the body. According to the speculation of relevant scholars, the casting date is no later than 552 BC. Being able to cast such complex patterns and delicate bronze wares during the Spring and Autumn Period shows the high level of manufacturing techniques at that time. It has to be said that the wisdom of the ancients is truly

admirable.



Figure 24. Sword of Goujian, the King of Yue in the late Spring and Autumn Period

As a bronze ware used as a food container, the tripod is the most well - known. It is also a symbol of the kingdom and social hierarchy. In “Shangshu”, one of China’s earliest historical documents, it is already recorded that “the system of nine tripods is for the Son of Heaven, the system of seven tripods is for the vassal states, the system of five tripods is for the ministers and senior officials, and the system of three or one tripod is for the scholars”. In terms of function, the tripod is used to cook and store meat, so there are two types: with a lid and without a lid. In terms of shape, there are round tripods and square tripods. Judging from the unearthed situation, the status of the square tripod is more noble than that of the round tripod, while the round tripod is more practical and convenient than the square tripod.

In addition to the ritual vessels for food and drink, the two important categories of bronze wares as practical utensils are weapons and musical instruments. The development of bronze wares started from the Xia and Shang dynasties and gradually declined from the Qin and Han dynasties. The development of bronze wares as weapons and musical instruments generally followed the same pattern. The difference is that although iron weapons had emerged in the late Warring States period, the smelting and casting technologies were not

yet perfect. Therefore, bronze weapons were still the main weapons equipped by the army in the Qin Dynasty. Moreover, standardized production had emerged at this time, so they could be cast in large quantities to meet the needs of the huge army.

In the early days, bronze contained more impurities and was soft in texture. Later, with the continuous improvement of smelting and purification techniques, most of the impurities were removed, and bronze wares became harder. However, due to the relatively high tin content, the texture of bronze was hard but brittle and prone to breakage. Judging from the bronze weapons unearthed from various periods, at least by the late Spring and Autumn Period, craftsmen had found a way to further purify bronze. The discovery of the Sword of Goujian, King of Yue, proved this with its excellent material. This sword was unearthed in 1965 from a Chu tomb in Jiangling County, Jingzhou, Hubei Province. The sword is 55.7 cm in overall height, 4.6 cm in width, the handle is 8.4 cm long, and it weighs 875 grams. The sword body is covered with patterns. Scientific tests have shown that the sulfur content in the patterned areas is relatively high, so it can prevent corrosion. The sword tip was still extremely sharp when unearthed. On the sword body near the handle, there are eight characters inscribed, “ 钺王鸠浅，自乍用钺 ” (King Goujian of Yue, personally made this sword.) , proving that it was the weapon used by Goujian, King of Yue at that time. The Qin Dynasty bronze long sword unearthed later in the Terracotta Army pits of Emperor Qinshihuang is long and sharp. Research has found that this Qin sword adopted an anti-rust technique similar to the modern chromium salt oxidation technique, and this technique did not appear in Germany and the United States until the 20th century. Why this technique was used in the Qin sword two thousand years ago remains a mystery, which makes people marvel at the wisdom of the ancients.

Another important bronze musical instrument is the bronze chime bells. The sound of the bells is unique and far - reach-

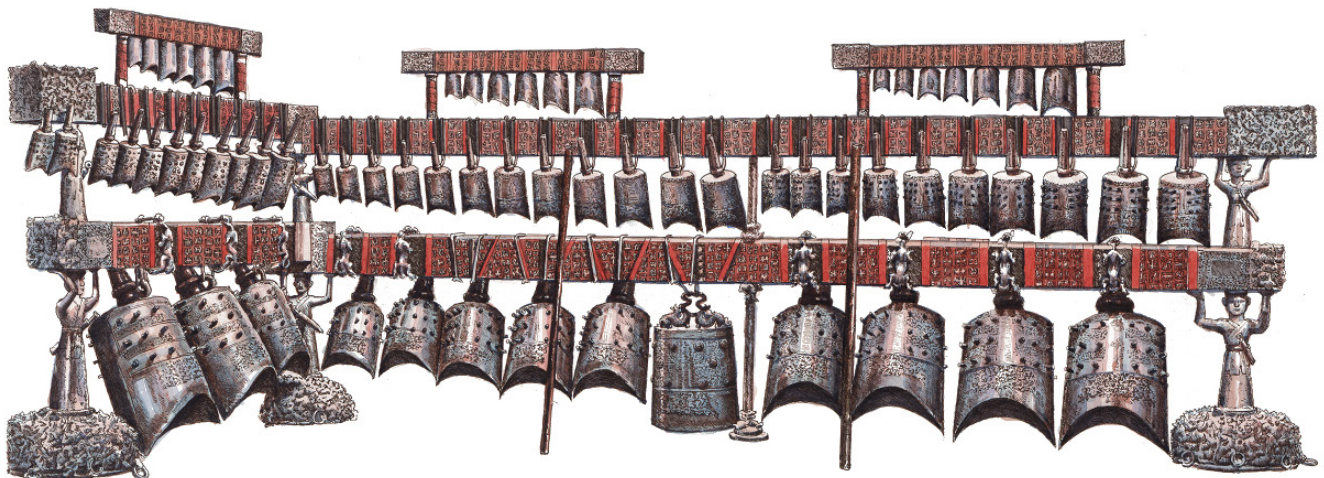
ing, and it is believed that they can communicate with the spiritual world. They were important utensils used in ancient sacrifices and ceremonies. They were also used to send signals during military commands. In ancient times, there was a tradition of casting bells to commemorate major events. Therefore, some bells were inscribed with inscriptions recording important events or sacrificial information. The image of the bell had already appeared as early as the Neolithic period, when it was a small - sized pottery bell. This shows that people already knew how to use the principle of cavity resonance to make sounding instruments. Bronze bells began to appear in the Shang Dynasty (around 1600 BC - around 1046 BC). During the Western Zhou Dynasty, the production technology and art of bells reached a peak. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the shapes and timbres of bells gradually became more diverse, making them an important part of musical instruments.

7. Practical Artistic Furniture

Ancient Chinese furniture was mainly made of wood. The wisdom of the Chinese people lies in the use of a unique mortise and tenon structure when making furniture, which is also the essence of traditional Chinese woodworking techniques. Traditional furniture is based on practicality, and the style, size, and position of the mortise and tenon are set by fully considering mechanical balance. Each piece of furniture is composed of multiple solid wood components, and the various components of the furniture are closely connected mainly through the mortise and tenon structure. After combination, the mortise and tenon structure is completely hidden in the structure, forming a solid whole, while creating a smooth - lined appearance, which is both beautiful and easy to use.

In addition to being classified into seating furniture, bedding furniture, tables and desks, storage cabinets, and display racks according to different usage functions, traditional Chinese furniture also has more detailed classifications based on

Figure 25. Bronze chime bells from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng in the Warring States Period



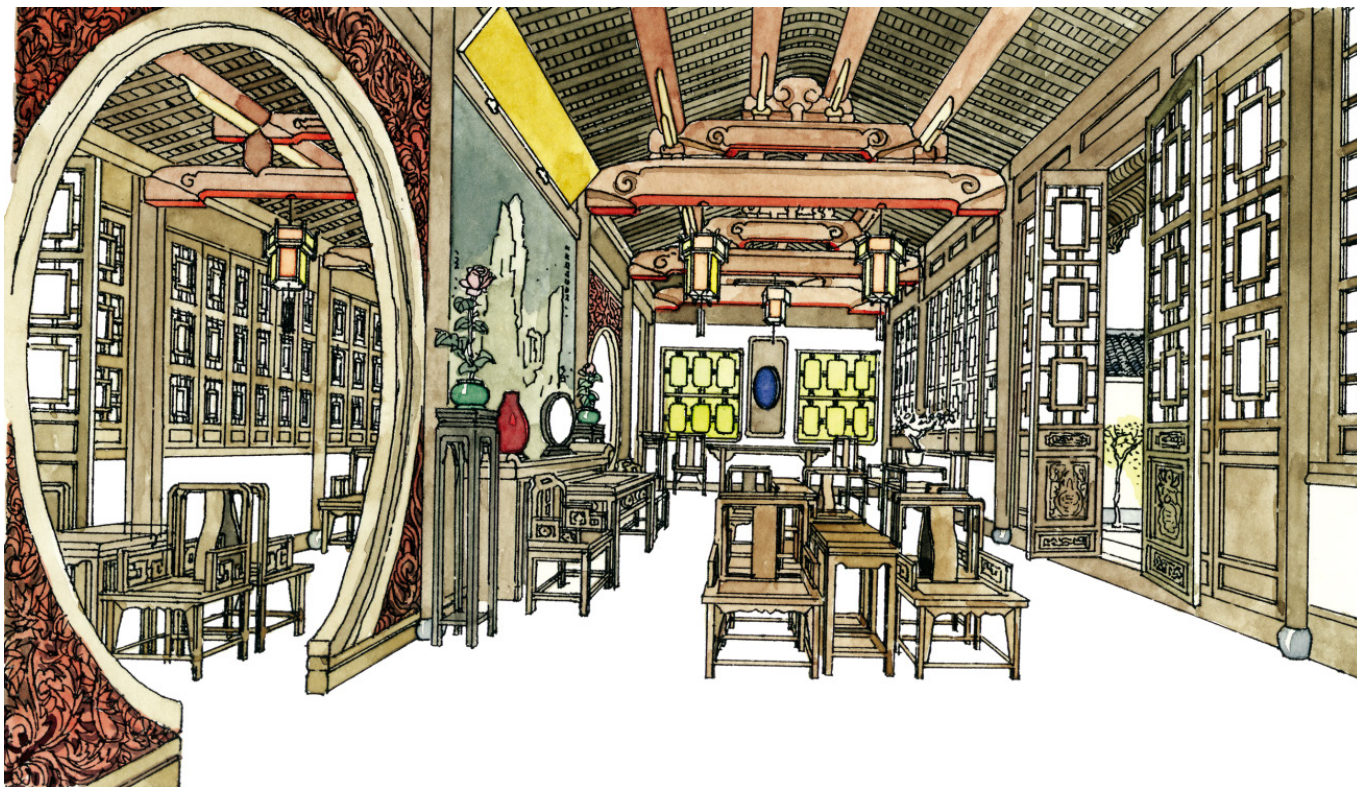


Figure 26. Furniture arrangement in Chinese garden architecture

its placement location and application scenarios. In specific applications, not only the usage function of the furniture is required, but also the decorative image as a physical display in the space is emphasized, and more attention is paid to the fit between the “aura” of the furniture’s appearance and the spatial atmosphere. For example, the size and color of the furniture should be as consistent as possible with the color of the interior decoration of the space. Chinese furniture mainly showcases the natural wood color or black painted finish to create a calm image; the furniture styles in gardens are more lively and the decorations are more unrestrained. The furniture styles in different buildings can reflect the owner’s economic strength and aesthetic level. The practicality of traditional Chinese furniture not only refers to the physical part of the furniture, but also includes the “style” reflected by the appearance style. Only when the two are combined can it be the way to use Chinese furniture.

The table - like furnishings used in daily life mainly include: square tables, round tables, crescent - shaped tables, long tables, long cases, desks, painting tables, qin tables, offering tables, offering cases, etc. These are set up according to different functional needs and ritual purposes. The shapes, sizes, placement positions and daily uses of the tables are all different. Some can be used interchangeably, while the functions of some tables are irreplaceable. Moreover, due to different regional customs, the usage rules and styles are also diverse. For example, offering tables and cases are used for sacrificing and worshipping ancestors, square tables for eight people are used to receive important guests, and round tables are used

for family meals.

The length of a long table generally does not exceed twice its width; if it does, it is called a strip table. There are two types: with a waistband and without a waistband. This kind of long table is very similar in shape to a table. The development of this kind of table originated from the food trays used in ancient China to deliver food. The trays are divided into rectangular and round types. Rectangular food tables usually have four legs, while round food tables have three legs. Early food tables were very low, which was suitable for the living characteristics of people sitting on the floor. Later, as people abandoned the way of sitting cross - legged and instead sat with their feet hanging down, the legs of tables, desks, and chairs were lengthened accordingly, turning into high - legged furniture.

The Tang Dynasty was a period of transition from low-footed furniture to high-footed furniture. High-footed furniture from the Western Regions was gradually accepted and popularized by people. Through continuous integration with the culture and lifestyle of the Han people in their living areas, the styles of these high-footed furniture also developed in a direction that was more in line with the traditional culture and aesthetics of the Central Plains of China. By the Song Dynasty, the shapes of chairs and stools were simple, delicate, and elegant, and the furniture structures became more reasonable and refined. High-type furniture such as chairs, stools, tables, side tables, cabinets, and shelves for sitting with feet hanging down were very popular in people’s daily lives. On the basis

of inheriting the craftsmanship of the Song Dynasty, the Ming Dynasty introduced new ideas, emphasizing simplicity and plainness in shape, which met the needs of human functions. In the Qing Dynasty, chairs and stools gradually deviated from the style of the Ming Dynasty and blindly pursued richness and luxury. These furniture not only reflected the craftsmanship level at that time but also embodied the social culture and aesthetic trends.

Traditional Chinese sitting furniture includes beds, couches, chairs, stools, as well as mats used by the ancients when “sitting on the ground”. The couch emerged around the later period of the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC - 8 AD). It is a piece of furniture with four legs and a rectangular seating surface. The smaller ones are only for one person to sit alone, while the larger ones can be used for sitting or lying down, or can be used by two people at the same time. However, it takes up a large area and is not conducive to use in ordinary rooms. Although with the transformation of people’s lifestyle towards high - legged furniture, the chair, as a typical high - legged sitting furniture, is more comfortable to use and gradually becomes popular, becoming the mainstream sitting furniture.

Chairs have evolved into three major categories: stools, chairs, and thrones, and are further subdivided into various names and shapes, such as square stools, round stools, long stools, folding chairs, grand master chairs, official hat chairs, southern official hat chairs, hoop chairs, rose chairs, lamp-hanging chairs, imperial palace chairs, etc. In terms of development form, chairs are also more mature than ordinary seating furniture. Chairs are mostly used in combination with tables and desks. Ancient chair and stool furniture is an important part of Chinese classical furniture. They have evolved with the development of history, from low to high, from simple to complex, not only meeting people’s needs in function, but also demonstrating the characteristics of each period in art.

The throne is a seat exclusive to ancient emperors, also known as the dragon chair, symbolizing supreme power and status. It is usually elaborately decorated and has a complex structure. Besides the throne, the types and shapes of chairs are extremely rich and diverse. The most basic chair consists of a seat surface, four legs, and a backrest. Armrests on both sides can be either present or absent. According to different usage habits and functions in various regions, various designs and changes are made to the components of the chair for easy daily use, thus forming a wide variety of chair names. For example, the official hat chair is named because the shape of its backrest is similar to that of an ancient official hat, and it is divided into the official hat chair with the ends of the armrests and backrest protruding and the southern official hat chair. The rose chair is a small, exquisitely decorated backrest chair, often used by women.

In addition to chairs, stools are another very common type of seating. Their structure is relatively simple, consisting



Figure 27. Semi - circular table with ice - crack pattern of the Qing Dynasty



Figure 28. Four - pronged official - hat chair



Figure 29. Large square stool

only of a seat surface and legs, without a backrest. Due to their simple shape and convenient use, a large number of them have been spread and they are widely used. From noble bureaucrats to ordinary people, various types of stools are indispensable in daily life at home. There are square stools with a quadrilateral and relatively wide seat surface, and four legs perpendicular to the ground; round stools with a circular seat surface, usually supported by four or three legs; long benches, which are long strip-shaped and used for multiple people to sit side by side, also known as long stools, etc. In addition, due to different usage functions, there are different names. For example, a four-legged stool that is often used in conjunction with beds or seats is often used for people to rest their feet when sitting reclined on a bed or seat, so it is called a footstool. Another type of usually low circular or square seating without a backrest and armrests is called a sitting pier.

Early stools generally consisted of a narrow and long seat surface and four legs, and there could be various sizes depending on the length, width, and breadth of the seat surface. In the mural of the banquet in the Tang Dynasty, the stools were arranged with long tables, and could accommodate 5 - 6 people to sit in a row. Small stools were only for one person to sit on. They could also be used for climbing, such as the footrests when getting into a sedan chair or mounting a horse, which were actually a kind of stools. There were also many changes in shape and material. For example, the seat surface could be square, round, fan - shaped, hexagonal, and polygonal, etc. The stool legs also had many shapes such as straight legs and curved legs, and they would be placed in spaces with different functions due to their different shapes. There were



Figure 30. Cypress - wood bed with cloud - shaped columns



Figure 31. Study's antique display shelf in traditional folk houses

also carved stone stools, which were generally placed in gardens or garden pavilions and could withstand wind and rain better.

Beds are essential furniture in family life and the most important main furnishings in the bedroom. The beds described in ancient Chinese classics include two meanings: beds and couches. It was not until the appearance of the couch that the function of the bed gradually changed to be only used for sleeping at night. The couch mainly undertakes the sitting function of the bed. At the same time, the couch can also be used as a temporary resting bed for leisure during the day. Ancient beds and couches are not only furniture for daily use, but also the main furniture for room furnishings and the center of room furnishings. In room furnishings, the position and size of the bed and couch are usually determined first, and then various types of furniture in the room, such as cabinets, boxes, tables, desks, dressing tables, etc., are placed around the bed and couch, reflecting the lifestyle and aesthetic taste of ancient people.

In addition to the couch, the furniture commonly used in the bedroom mainly includes canopy beds, daybeds, and enclosed beds. The canopy bed is the most commonly used bedding in Han Chinese families. As the name implies, it has a frame set above the bed body, enclosing a relatively enclosed space for sleeping. Canopy beds are divided into four-poster and six-poster types. The four-poster type has columns only at the four corners of the bed, with fences installed on both sides and the rear of the bed. Based on this, the six-poster type has two additional columns on the front edge of the bed, with additional panels. For beds with a top on the frame, one can choose to install a top cover or use textiles to enclose the top. The enclosures on both sides and the rear of the bed can be simple or elaborate. A simple one can have a fabric tent with a top hung on the four columns, while a complex one can use fully carved and exquisitely crafted flower screens. Due to the above characteristics of the canopy bed, it is very common in Han Chinese families in both the north and the south, and is one of the most commonly used pieces of furniture.

In the living rooms of the Chinese people, there is another type of furniture called the antique display shelf. This kind of shelf for displaying cultural relics and utensils can also be used to divide indoor space. It is a representative of ancient shelf - type furniture. The antique display shelf is also known as the multi - treasure shelf or the treasure shelf. It is made up of wooden boards joined together to form various types of lattice patterns, thus creating many open - style shelves of different shapes and sizes. The antique display shelf can be made into a free - standing piece of furniture and moved as needed. It can also be fixed between columns through mortise - and - tenon joints and used as a space partition. Since each shelf of the antique display shelf is transparent, there is an effect of separation without isolation when dividing the space. Various cultural relics and antiques are usually placed on the antique display shelf. It can be carved for decoration

and become part of the indoor decoration. It can also be kept plain or only painted to highlight the antiques displayed on it. Different families use different types of furniture. The use of furniture reflects the economic situation, the mood of the owner, and the different family atmospheres of each family. The interior furnishings of the emperor's residence, the high - ranking official's residence, the residence of literati and refined scholars, and the home furnishings of ordinary people all have their own different style characteristics due to differences in identity, economic strength, and preferences. Therefore, furniture arrangements have both vertical inheritance and horizontal connections, as well as distinctiveness and individuality. They not only reflect the general commonality of "home" in a broad sense but also possess the individuality of "home" in a narrow sense.

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Patriarchy's Sewage: How a Murdered Student and a Dead River Became the Same Body in Li Xinmo's performance art

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Abstract: This paper examines Chinese feminist artist Li Xinmo's performance artworks *The Death of Xinkai River* and *A Ritual of Farewell* as critical intervention in ecofeminist discourse within the East Asian context. Through a semiotic analysis of polluted water as artistic medium—manifested in cyanobacterial blooms, toxic odors, and corporeal immersion—the study reveals how the work deconstructs romanticized “feminine-water” metaphors to expose the structural parallels between ecological degradation and gendered violence. Framed by Western ecofeminist theories (e.g. Vandana Shiva's “subsistence perspective”, Karen Warren's “logic of domination”) and East Asian “feminine waters” philosophies (e.g. the *I Ching*'s “Kan as water” cosmology, Ming-Qing “pond drowning” gender discipline), the analysis demonstrates how the artist's embodied engagement with contaminated waterways subverts the passive “Ophelia” trope while unmasking developmentalism's dual exploitation of women and nature. The paper argues that the work's anti-pastoral aesthetics reconfigure the Xinkai River as both “ecological corpse” and “patriarchal accomplice”, thereby catalyzing cross-disciplinary dialogues on environmental and gender justice.

Keywords: ecofeminism; feminine waters; performance art; Xinkai River; pollution semiotics; gendered violence

1. Preface/Introduction

The Xinkai River, as a vital water system in the Tianjin region, historically played a crucial ecological supporting role in the city's formation and development. However, over the past decade, due to the large-scale discharge of urban sewage and industrial wastewater, the river's ecosystem has suffered severe pollution damage. The pollution exhibits distinct seasonal characteristics: under high summer temperatures, water eutrophication leads to excessive algal proliferation, with cyanobacteria forming dense surface layers, accompanied by the diffusion of foul odors caused by organic matter decomposition.

In the spring of 2008, a violent criminal incident occurred in this watershed: a female student from Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts was sexually assaulted and murdered, with her body discarded in the Xinkai River. Responding to this incident and the dual reality of the river's ecological degradation, contemporary Chinese feminist artist Li Xinmo performed a piece of activist art titled *The Death of Xinkai River*. In this work, the artist, dressed in white, voluntarily entered the

polluted waters, slowly submerging herself into the cyanobacteria-covered river—a process that constituted a visually striking artistic statement. [1] (Li, 2008)

Following this, the artist extended the work into a subsequent creation. In October 2008, under the framework of the 6th *DaDao Performance Art Festival*, Li Xinmo presented a performance piece titled *A Ritual of Farewell*. In the preparatory phase, the artist systematically collected water samples from polluted rivers along the Tianjin-Beijing corridor as artistic material. During the exhibition phase, within the exhibition space of Beijing's 798 Art District *Rain Gallery*, the artist employed a large transparent glass container as the medium for the performance. [2] (Li, 2008)

In the course of the performance, the artist, dressed in white, lay horizontally inside the container. As the polluted water was gradually poured in, her body became progressively submerged. Throughout the performance, the artist exhibited labored breathing and vocalized distress within the intensely foul-smelling aquatic environment, until her face was fully immersed—marking the conclusion of the act.

2. Literature Review: Theoretical Trajectories of Western Ecofeminism and East Asian “Feminine Waters” Theories

2.1 Development and Core Theories of Western Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism, as a critical theory emerging in the 1970s, seeks to reveal the structural connections between patriarchal oppression of both women and nature. Its central thesis posits that environmental exploitation and gender oppression share the same logic of domination, rooted in hierarchical binary oppositions (e.g., male/female, culture/nature, reason/emotion).

1) Foundational Works: The Philosophical Framework of Ecofeminism

Françoise d'Eaubonne (1974) first proposed the concept of “ecofeminism” in *Feminism or Death* (French: *Le Féminisme ou la mort*), arguing that patriarchal expansion causes ecological crises and that women must become the agents of ecological revolution. [3]

Susan Griffin (1978), in *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, employed poetic writing to deconstruct Western rationalism’s objectification of both nature and women, emphasizing their isomorphic experiences of oppression. [4]

2) Critical Developments: The Intervention of Third-World Ecofeminism

Vandana Shiva (1988), in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, critiques Western developmentalism’s exploitation of rural South Asian women, proposing the concept of “ecological imperialism” to reveal how globalized agriculture (e.g., the Green Revolution) destroys indigenous women’s livelihoods and traditional ecological knowledge. She emphasizes the Hindu cosmological concept of “Prakriti” (Mother Earth), asserting that women and land collectively constitute the foundation of life reproduction. [5]

Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva (1993), in *Ecofeminism*, further advance the “Subsistence Perspective”, advocating for a women-centered sustainable economic model to resist capitalist-patriarchal extractive logic. [6]

3) Philosophical Deepening: The Ethical Turn in Ecofeminism

Karen Warren (2000), in *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, systematizes the “Logic of Domination” theory, demonstrating how oppressive ideologies rationalize exploitation through conceptual frameworks (e.g., “nature as feminine/passive/requiring domestication”). She proposes an “Ethics of Care”, emphasizing relational and context-sensitive moral judgment as an alternative to male-centric abstract environmental ethics. [7]

Val Plumwood (2002), in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, critiques Western rationalism’s “Human Exceptionalism”, advocating for reconstructing “reciprocal subject relations” between humans and nature. [8]

2.2 Localized Trajectories of East Asian “Feminine Waters” Theory

In East Asian cultural traditions, the association between water and femininity transcends mere metaphor, embedding itself within cosmological frameworks, ethical systems, and social practices. This theoretical lineage provides the cultural foundation for interpreting the “water-female” symbolism in Li Xinmo’s performance art.

1) “Water” and Feminine Essence in Chinese Philosophy

The Book of Changes (I Ching) and Daoist Thought:

The *Xici Zhuan* commentary in *I Ching* proposes “Kan as water”, symbolizing perilous depth, pliancy, and life source. Its trigram (☵) with two yin lines enclosing one yang line implies the feminine quality of “softness enveloping strength”. [9]

Laozi’s *Daodejing* (Chapter 8) correlates water’s virtue with the feminine wisdom of “non-contention” and “flowing downward”, constituting a critique of patriarchal rigidity. [10]

Five Elements (in Chinese: Wu Xing) Theory:

Water belongs to “yin”, corresponding to north, winter, and blackness, while resonating with female menstruation and fertility (as documented in *Huangdi Neijing*). This forms a cognitive chain of “woman-water-life cycle”. [11]

2) Hydraulic Violence and Gender Politics in East Asian Cultures

“Pond Drowning” and Patriarchal Discipline:

From the Ming-Qing period onward, the clan-administered “pond drowning” (in Chinese: Chentang) punishment for “unchaste” women (documented in *The Unofficial History of the Scholars*, in Chinese: *Rulin Waishi*) [12] transformed water bodies into tools for patriarchal purification of “pollution”, reflecting gendered binaries of purity/defilement (cf. Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger*, 1966).

In contemporary contexts, industrial pollution poisoning rivers (e.g., Xinkai River) constitutes a modernized continuation of this violent tradition.

Japanese “Aquatic Death” Aesthetics:

Kawabata Yasunari’s *Snow Country* employs the “Mirror Pond” [13] as symbolic of women’s silent erasure, while contemporary artist Yayoi Kusama’s water installations—with

infinite mirror reflections and water flowing beneath viewers' feet—deconstruct the passivity inherent in traditional “drowned maiden” imagery. [14]

2.3 Theoretical Dialogues: Intersections Between Ecofeminism and Feminine Waters Research

Li Xinmo's performance art can be interpreted through these theoretical frameworks:

Dual Violence of Polluted Water:

The Xinkai River serves as both a site of ecological death and a witness to gendered violence (the corpse-dumping case), echoing Vandana Shiva's critique of “developmentalism sacrificing women-nature”.

Subverting the “Ophelia” Narrative:

Through conscious self-objectification (e.g., performances in glass tanks), the artist disrupts the traditional fatalism of “women-passive death”, actualizing Val Plumwood's concept of “resistant subjectivity”.

Politics of Foul Aesthetics:

The stench-laden water challenges East Asian cultural ethics of “water's purity” (e.g., “When the Canglang's water is muddy, it may wash my feet”), forcing audiences to confront developmentism's consequences.

3. Semiotic Analysis of Polluted Water Bodies: Ecological Corpses, Gendered Violence, and Patriarchal Complicity

3.1 Cyanobacteria-Covered River Surface as Visual Representation of “Ecological Corpse”

Timothy Morton emphasizes in *Dark Ecology* (2016) that ecological crises are not distant “others”, but rather “hyper-objects” that have permeated daily life—massive, viscous, inescapable entities of pollution. [15] The cyanobacteria-infested Xinkai River precisely embodies this “hyper-object”.

Putrid Skin:

The green mucous membrane formed by cyanobacteria coating the water surface resembles decomposing organisms proliferating on a corpse's skin, signaling the river's “ecological death”. This death occurs not instantaneously but through slow asphyxiation—the continuous influx of industrial wastewater (excessive nitrogen/phosphorus) and sewage deprives the waterbody of self-purification capacity, transforming it into a “zombie ecosystem”.

Non-Human Mourning Ritual:



Figure 1. *The Death of Xinkai River* by Li Xinmo, 2008, in Tianjin, China

Website Source: <https://collection.sina.com.cn/zlxx/20120228/155157642.shtml>

Li Xinmo's act of submerging herself in cyanobacteria while robed in white can be interpreted as a “non-anthropocentric funeral”. Her body simultaneously serves as mourner (for the river) and mourned (symbolizing female victims), blurring boundaries between human and non-human. This resonates with Morton's “mesh” ontology that posits the interwoven existence of all life forms.

Anti-Pastoral Aesthetics:

While traditional Chinese landscape painting portrays water bodies as embodiments of harmonious “supreme goodness” (exemplified by Ma Yuan's *Twelve Views of Water* from the Southern Song Dynasty), the cyanobacteria-polluted river surface constructs an “anti-sublime” spectacle—it resists aestheticization and compels viewers to confront the ugly reality of ecological collapse.

3.2 Isomorphic Violence: Rape/Dumping and Toxic Discharge

The Xinkai River functions not merely as an ecological disaster site, but as an accomplice to gendered violence. The rapist's disposal of the female student's corpse into the polluted river and factories' discharge of toxic wastewater share identical patriarchal logic of “violation-abandonment”.

1) Water as Complicit in Patriarchal Violence

Gendered Metaphors of Pollution:

Industrial wastewater's heavy metals (e.g., mercury, lead) possess reproductive toxicity, with long-term contamination elevating women's reproductive health risks—materially paralleling rape's violation of female bodies.

Ritualistic Parallels:

Both corpse-dumping and waste discharge discard “unwanted matter” (female corpses/industrial waste) into feminine-coded

spaces (rivers), achieving ultimate expulsion of the “Other”. As noted in Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* (1966), societies maintain boundaries by excluding “filth”. [16] Here, the Xinkai River becomes patriarchy’s dumping ground for “double pollution” (female bodies + industrial waste).

2) Eco-Gendered Intersectional Violence

Parallel Logics of Rape Culture & Environmental Exploitation:

Rape Culture	Environmental Exploitation
Female bodies as lootable “resources”	Nature as extractable “productive materials”
Victim-blaming rhetoric (“Why was she out late?”/“Why dress provocatively?” etc.)	River-blaming rhetoric (“Poor self-purification capacity”)
Societal silence toward sexual violence	Governmental failure in pollution regulation

Aquatic “Secondary Murder”:

The female corpse discarded in the polluted river undergoes “symbolic annihilation”—accelerated decomposition by toxic water and cyanobacteria enveloping the remains render the death “invisible.” This replicates patriarchy’s erasure of female victims’ memory (e.g., “slut-shaming” silencing rape cases).

3.3 Semiotic Resistance in Li Xinmo’s Performance Art

In *The Death of Xinkai River* and *A Ritual of Farewell*, the artist’s bodily intervention reconstructs the semiotic network of polluted water.

From “Ecological Corpse” to “Resistant Medium”:

By voluntarily submerging into cyanobacteria, she embodies the river’s death-state, rendering invisible ecological trauma tangible. This “becoming-pollution” strategy subverts traditional environmentalism’s savior narrative, instead acknowledging humanity’s inherent complicity in contamination.

Exposing Patriarchal Complicity:

The visual transformation of white garments gradually blackened in polluted water symbolizes the disintegration of the “pure femininity” myth—patriarchy simultaneously demands women’s “purity” (moral discipline) while systematically thrusting them into defilement through institutionalized violence (e.g., rape culture). Li Xinmo’s performance reveals: women’s “filth” is not innate, but forcibly imposed.

4. Drowning Metaphors: From *Ophelia* to Contemporary Performance Art’s Female



Figure 2. *A Ritual of Farewell* by Li Xinmo, 2008, in Beijing, China

Website Source: http://art.china.cn/huodong/2009-12/17/content_3301598.htm

Death Narratives

4.1 The Aesthetic Genealogy and Gender Politics of Aquatic Death

John Everett Millais’s 1851 painting *Ophelia* (1851–1852) and Li Xinmo’s 21st-century performance art photography, though separated by a century and a half, form a striking intertextual relationship in visual composition. This trans-temporal dialogue reveals the enduring vitality of the “drowned woman” motif in Western art tradition and its underlying gender politics.

In Shakespeare’s original *Hamlet*, Ophelia’s death is framed as an “accidental mishap”—the lovelorn, mentally fractured maiden wanders singing strange songs, and while gathering wildflowers, “like ignorant life, sinks down singing”. Millais, through Pre-Raphaelite naturalism, transforms this scene into a detailed visual allegory: floating garments, scattered blossoms, and slightly parted lips construct a romanticized death tableau where water serves as both gentle tomb and purifying medium. [17]

4.2 Passive Martyrdom vs. Active Performance: Reconfiguring Power in Death Narratives

The visual similarities between Li Xinmo’s performance art photographs and *Ophelia*—floating bodies, water-encircled faces, limbs entangled with aquatic plants/cyanobacteria—precisely underscore their fundamental divergence. Millais’s Ophelia epitomizes the passive female archetype accepting her fate, her beauty lying in harmless dissolution; whereas Li Xinmo’s performer is a conscious accuser, each staged suffocation a deliberate reenactment of violence.

This contrast reflects shifting conceptions of female subjectivity across eras: Victorian drowning imagery aestheticizes female death as the “eternal feminine” (*Ewig-Weibliche*), while contemporary performance art transforms it into political pro-



Figure 3. *Ophelia* (1851-1852) by John Everett Millais

Website Source: <https://artincontext.org/ophelia-by-john-everett-millais/>

test. Crucially, Li's polluted waters utterly deconstruct *Ophelia*'s romanticized clear stream—when cyanobacteria cling like blood clots to skin, all poeticization of death is disrupted.

4.3 Hydropolitics of Gendered Space: An Archaeological Perspective

The contrast between these two drowning imageries reveals the historical evolution of water as gendered space. In Western painting traditions—from *Ophelia* to John William Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shalott* (1888)—water remains coded as feminine space: both life-originating source and woman-devouring abyss. This duality mirrors patriarchy's dual discipline of female bodies: demanding fluid docility while fearing flood-like uncontrollability.

Li Xinmo's practice pushes this cultural subconscious to its limit through polluted water intervention: when Xinkai River's filth ceases to be symbolic "feminine essence" but literal industrial waste, the romantic metaphor "woman as water" materializes into the political reality of "woman as sewage". This transformation gives tangible form to long-naturalized gendered violence.

4.4 The Thanatology of Performance in Contemporary Art

From an art-historical methodology perspective, Li Xinmo's performance art establishes an "anti-Ophelia" creative paradigm. Where Millais alleviated audience anxiety about gendered violence through death's aestheticization, contemporary artists provoke that very anxiety by recreating death's visceral reality. This strategic shift reflects critical art's post-20th century epistemological turn: from "representing others' suffering" to "becoming suffering's medium".

When Li's face is finally submerged in polluted water, spectators witness not Shakespearean "sweet death", but "absolutely unaesthetic death"—one that refuses sublimation, demanding solely to be seen, remembered, and held accountable.

5. "Pond Drowning" in Chinese Tradition: Hydro-purification Metaphors and a Genealogy of Gendered Violence

5.1 The Social Fabric of "Pond Drowning" as Disciplinary Ritual

In traditional Chinese juridical practices and clan governance, "pond drowning" (in Chinese: Chentang) as extralegal punishment for female transgression was deeply rooted in Confucian ethics and yin-yang cosmology. This violent ritual of immersing living women in water constituted not mere physical elimination, but a comprehensive semiotic disciplinary system.

Local gazetteers and legal archives reveal how Ming-Qing era executions of "adulterous women" were performative spectacles: clan elders convened public viewings, victims were bathed and dressed before bamboo-cage confinement, with drowning sites strategically chosen at village fengshui ponds or ancestral-temple pools. Such ritualized violence transformed female bodies into moral warning media, performing disciplinary inscription of communal memory through public water burial.

5.2 Water's Dual Metaphors in Punishment Systems

In traditional Chinese "pond drowning" (in Chinese: Chentang) executions, water embodied contradictory cultural meanings: both purgative tool and defilement's destination. This paradoxical cognition stemmed from hybridized governance wisdom—the *Zhouli*'s "using yin rituals to teach kinship" and Daoist "Great Yin refines form" concepts.

The Qing dynasty legal manual *Xing'an Huilan* discovered in Zhangzhou, Fujian explicitly records pond drowning's function to "cleanse filth with water, restoring primordial purity"—here water served not just as physical killing instrument but symbolic purification apparatus. Crucially, this "purification" logic carried distinct gendered targeting: male offenders received "dry punishments" (decapitation/flogging-to-death) while women suffered "kan punishments" (water executions), aligning with I Ching's feminine positioning of "kan as water, as abyss".

5.3 Historical Resonances in Li Xinmo's Performance Art

Li Xinmo's *The Death of Xinkai River* and *A Ritual of Farewell* engages in profound dialogue with the pond drowning tradition. The artist's voluntary immersion in polluted water simultaneously parodically reenacts historical lynching and radically deconstructs hydropurification metaphors.

When cyanobacteria-covered rivers replace clan ponds' clear

waters, when environmental pollutants substitute moral stigma, the traditional violent logic of “cleansing through water” inverts into a critical language of “bearing witness through pollution”. This artistic strategy not only exposes the epistemological isomorphism between patriarchy and ecological violence, but through symbolic bodily sacrifice, summons the historical ghosts of drowned women back into contemporary environmental justice discourse.

6. Conclusion: *The Death of Xinkai River* and *A Ritual of Farewell* as Ecofeminist Praxis

Li Xinmo’s *The Death of Xinkai River* and its subsequent performance *A Ritual of Farewell* transcend individual artistic expression to become a radical intervention in ecofeminist discourse. By embodying the polluted waters of the Xinkai River—a site of ecological collapse and gendered violence—the artist exposes the intertwined logics of patriarchal domination and environmental exploitation. Her work dismantles the romanticized tropes of “feminine water” in both Western and East Asian traditions, replacing them with a visceral confrontation with the material realities of pollution and misogynistic violence.

The performance’s semiotic power lies in its dual critique: it unveils the river as an “ecological corpse” suffocated by industrial waste while simultaneously framing it as an accomplice to patriarchal terror, where the discarded bodies of women and toxic effluent share the same fate of erasure. By submerging herself in cyanobacteria-infested water, Li Xinmo inverts the historical script of “pond drowning” (in Chinese: Chentang) —no longer a passive victim of patriarchal purifi-

cation rituals, her body becomes an active agent of exposure, forcing audiences to reckon with the suppressed narratives of ecological and gendered violence.

Theoretical frameworks of ecofeminism and East Asian “feminine waters” converge in this work to highlight the structural parallels between the subjugation of women and nature. Vandana Shiva’s critique of developmental violence, Val Plumwood’s “logic of domination”, and Timothy Morton’s “hyper-objects” of pollution all resonate in Li’s artistic praxis. Her performance disrupts the aestheticization of female death (as seen in the *Ophelia* tradition) and the cultural amnesia surrounding “pond drowning” (in Chinese: Chentang), replacing them with a grotesque, unflinching spectacle of decay—one that refuses redemption and instead demands accountability.

Ultimately, *The Death of Xinkai River* and *A Ritual of Farewell* are not merely laments but calls to action. It challenges the binaries of purity/defilement, active/passive, and human/non-human that underpin both patriarchal and ecological violence. By occupying the polluted water as both mourner and mourned, Li Xinmo constructs a new ritual—one that mourns the river’s death, memorializes its victims, and imagines a future where such violences are no longer submerged beneath the surface of history. In doing so, her work affirms ecofeminism’s central premise: the liberation of women and the healing of the earth are inseparable struggles.

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On the Optimization of Spatial Perception in the Semi-Panorama *The Chongqing Bombing* from A Field Theory Perspective

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Abstract: From the perspective of field theory, the association between habitus and perception within museum spaces is examined. It has been observed that traditional exhibition layouts are often characterized by symbolic abstraction, spatial detachment, and overly dense textual interpretation, through which visitors' habitus tends to become disconnected from historical perception. To address this issue, a habitus-oriented design scheme has been proposed and implemented in the semi-panorama *The Chongqing Bombing*, through which the gap between habitual cognition and perceptual experience has been effectively bridged. By analyzing the spatial perception optimization pathway that has been embodied in this semi-panorama, it is expected that practical strategies can be provided to enhance the effectiveness of historical and cultural communication undertaken through public art creation.

Keywords: *The Chongqing Bombing*; semi-panorama; field theory

I. The Dilemma Between Habitus and Perception in Museum Spaces

Within Bourdieu's field theory, habitus is defined as the cognitive framework and interpretive inertia that are shaped and sedimented through one's education and cultural experiences. In the context of museums with themes of the War of Resistance, habitus serves as a central medium of spatial perception. The depth to which visitors perceive the semi-panorama *The Chongqing Bombing* is determined more by the amount of wartime historical and cultural capital accumulated in their habitus than by the visual complexity of the artwork itself.

Based on interviews conducted with visitors to the Anti-Japanese War Hall of the Chongqing Museum, it was found that those lacking knowledge of Chongqing's wartime history faced three major perceptual barriers. These challenges were, to varying degrees, linked to the imbalance between habitus and the symbolic adaptation of space. Visitors without a foundation in Chongqing's wartime history (such as students and non-local tourist) tend to experience perception that remains confined to surface-level visuals, as their habitus lacks the historical references to the 1938–1943 bombings and the wartime urban features of the mountain city.

Most visitors, when faced with static exhibits (such as black-

and-white bombing photographs or explanatory panels), were found to focus mainly on the visible images or numerical data. Connections with the underlying historical narratives were seldom established. The ruins of a street that had been devastated by air raids in 1941 were frequently misinterpreted as scenes of ordinary wartime decay. Likewise, the figures related to the "June 5th Tunnel Massacre" were only vaguely recalled, while the collective resilience of the people remained insufficiently perceived. The indistinct visual quality and frequent use of technical or historical terminology in traditional displays make accurate comprehension dependent on a prior understanding of Chongqing's wartime experience. In the absence of such historical grounding, semiotic meaning is reduced to surface-level visual impressions. The stilted houses captured in historical photographs, for instance, tend to be identified merely as aged timber structures, whereas their role as crowded civilian dwellings highly vulnerable to fire is seldom recognized. Similarly, when figures are seen entering low tunnels, the action is often interpreted simply as concealment, without an awareness that these were air-raid shelters associated with the "June 5th Tunnel Massacre."

Many visitors also mentioned that their spatial experience in the Anti-Japanese War Exhibition Hall of the Chongqing Museum felt largely passive. The traditional display format—such as wartime artifacts enclosed in glass cases and pho-



Figure 1: Diorama of The Chongqing Bombing (Detail), 37m × 10m, by Gao Xiaohua

tographs mounted on walls—was often perceived as distant and detached. Since their habitus failed to transform static symbols into experiential scenes, visitors tended to glance at the exhibits and quickly forget them, making emotional resonance difficult to achieve. This phenomenon may also be associated with cognitive overload, which leads to perceptual avoidance. For most visitors, an exhibition that demands extensive reading is likely to be skimmed through, with textual content skipped in favor of visual elements. The abundance of specialized terminology and lengthy descriptions thus imposes a cognitive burden, further reinforcing surface-level perception. As a result, attention is restricted to superficial visual elements such as color and form, while the symbolic and historical meanings remain unconnected. In contrast, visitors whose habitus contains accumulated cultural capital related to the War of Resistance—such as historians or descendants of veterans—were able to interpret details in the paintings, including bullet marks on the stilted houses and the gesture of civilians covering their noses in the tunnel. These details evoked associations with heavily bombed districts in 1940 and the suffocation tragedy in the tunnel shelters, extending spatial perception from mere visual reception to layers of historical memory and emotional engagement. Such observations reaffirm Bourdieu's proposition that habitus determines the boundaries of cognition. When cultural capital is absent, spatial symbols are reduced to sensory “seeing” rather than cognitive “comprehending.”

These perceptual challenges highlight a central contradiction in Chongqing's current wartime cultural communication: traditional exhibition design presupposes that visitors possess a basic knowledge of Chongqing's wartime history, while the perceptual needs of those with low cognitive habitus have been largely neglected.

II. The Habitus-Adaptive Design of the Semi-Panorama *The Chongqing Bombing*

The semi-panorama *The Chongqing Bombing* that was added to the Chongqing Museum offers an optimized solution to the perceptual challenges mentioned above. The design takes habitus adaptation as its core idea. Through improvements in symbolism, spatial organization, and visitor experience, it enables a shift in perception from surface-level visual observation to a deeper connection with historical scenes. In this exhibition, abstract wartime cultural resources have been reinterpreted as concrete visual symbols that can be understood without a prior knowledge base. The use of familiar and scene-based visual forms reduces decoding difficulty and allows visitors to approach the core of historical experience directly through visual perception.

A design approach combining 360-degree panoramic presentation with coordinated sound, light, and electronic effects has been applied. This approach addresses the problem of passive observation that often occurs in traditional displays. By creating an immersive spatial environment and stimulating multiple senses, the semi-panorama changes the visitor's role from a passive observer to an active participant. Through this transformation, the perception of Chongqing's wartime culture is elevated from simple viewing to a more profound and embodied experience that engages both memory and emotion.

1. Restoration of Topographical Features and Bombing Reality

The semi-panorama is constructed within the architectural space of the museum, forming a three-dimensional scene that reflects the mountainous terrain of Chongqing. The city's unique topography and the sudden outbreak of air raids have been recreated with careful spatial detailing. On the left side of the space, stilted houses built against the hillside are shown under the simulated impact of a “shockwave” produced by projection. Sections of the roofs appear lifted, and fragments such as wooden chips and tiles are projected outward into the viewer's field of vision. On the right side, the riverside pier area is depicted with tilted wooden boats and displaced cargo. Scattered luggage and personal belongings are placed

along the stone steps, while the crowd in the semi-panorama is shown gathering toward the tunnel entrance. In the background, Nanshan is veiled in “smoke of gunpowder” created by projection, and the faint outlines of Japanese aircraft can be discerned against the sky. When viewers stand at the center of the scene, no clear visual boundaries can be detected. The surrounding panorama presents a continuous reconstruction of the 1941 bombing site in downtown Chongqing. This all-encompassing visual environment strengthens the viewer’s sense of spatial immersion and transforms the exhibition into an experiential reconstruction of wartime reality.

2. Synergy of Sound, Light, and Electronic Design

The sound–light–electronic system was conceived as a core element of scene empowerment. Through a layered orchestration of sound effects, lighting, and projection, the overall environmental atmosphere was constructed and continuously reinforced. Lighting was applied to reproduce the dim sky characteristic of the bombing period. The upper section of the semi-panorama remains largely dark, while the tunnel entrance and the area where the crowd gathers are illuminated by focused warm light. This technique highlights the central scene and simultaneously deepens the prevailing sense of anxiety and uncertainty. In the sound system of the semi-panorama *The Chongqing Bombing*, multiple layers of auditory cues were embedded. Distant intermittent air-raid sirens were designed to be heard, which instinctively evoked a sense of tension among visitors. Nearby, human shouts in Chongqing dialect, the rumble of collapsing buildings, and the muffled explosions of bombs were integrated. Through this acoustic layering, a vivid and multidimensional auditory scene was created, enabling visitors to sense spatial proximity and emotional pressure within the environment.

Survey data indicate that visitors spend an average of eight to ten minutes in the semi-panorama area of *The Chongqing Bombing*, compared with three to five minutes in traditional exhibition zones. Most visitors adopted a slow-paced and detail-oriented mode of observation, rather than the rapid browsing behavior typical of conventional displays. In one interview, a primary school student described his personal perception within the semi-panorama: when he heard the sirens and saw projected figures running for shelter, he felt as though he were standing in the street himself, fearful of being struck by the blast. This tension arising from the immersive environment illustrates a perceptual shift beyond superficial viewing. The atmosphere constructed through sound, light, and projection effectively compensates for the absence of wartime habitus and facilitates a transformation in museum engagement—from observing historical narratives to experiencing historical realities.

3. Layered Adaptation of Perceptual Touchpoints

The semi-panorama *The Chongqing Bombing* provides a progressive, low-effort pathway for visitors’ habitus. Initially,

surface-level perception is engaged through direct sensory experience, and subsequent textual annotations guide the extension of historical understanding.

The core of this layered adaptation lies in the precise alignment between visual symbols and explanatory notes. Technical terminology is minimized, with only essential information presented. Furthermore, annotations are placed in locations that are naturally visible to visitors, ensuring that the perceptual flow remains uninterrupted. In interviews, one primary school student reported that the annotations appearing alongside the tunnel area helped him recognize that the space was designed to simulate and reconstruct the historical scene. This realization stimulated his interest in learning more about the historical events depicted. Through a combination of visual attraction, supplemental annotation, and interest-driven engagement, the semi-panorama facilitates the transformation of habitus from simple observation to meaningful understanding. Visitors are guided from “seeing” to “comprehending,” enabling deeper cognitive and emotional engagement with Chongqing’s wartime history.

III. Implications of the Semi-Panorama *The Chongqing Bombing* for Museum Spatial Design

Compared with traditional exhibition areas, the semi-panorama *The Chongqing Bombing* first optimized visitor engagement at the behavioral level. Observations indicated that more visitors were no longer confined to passive viewing. Instead, they were encouraged to actively explore the visual scene. This change disrupted the conventional limitation in which visitors in traditional displays merely received information and engaged only in surface-level perception. Cognitive enhancement and emotional resonance were achieved through the intensification of the historical scene’s experiential quality. Most visitors reported experiencing tension or empathy toward the figures depicted in the images. Some were further motivated by these emotional responses to seek additional historical materials related to the bombing. In contrast, only a small proportion of visitors in traditional exhibition areas experienced similar emotional responses, and even fewer were prompted to explore historical documentation. These observations suggest that the semi-panorama transforms the visitor’s role from a passive observer of historical images into an empathic participant within the scene. Authentic emotional engagement fills the prior gaps in historical understanding, enabling comprehension rather than mere memorization of facts. After visiting the semi-panorama, the majority of visitors were able to accurately describe core scenarios, such as civilians sheltering in tunnels during air raids. Many could also recount additional details, including collapsing buildings and panicked crowds. Prior to visiting, only a very small number of visitors could provide such detailed accounts. This

insight encourages future public art creators to reconsider the function of museum-based artworks. The purpose should not be to compel visitors to memorize historical facts but to enable them to genuinely understand and experience the events depicted within historical scenes.

At its core, the semi-panorama represents a dialectical adaptation between the field of wartime memory and visitors' habitus. As Bourdieu emphasized, a field and habitus can only exert their full function through mutual interaction. This adaptation was realized through the coordinated design of symbols, spatial layout, and annotations. At the symbolic level, everyday visual elements were selected, such as Chongqing wooden houses, aligning closely with visitors' habitual experiences. At the spatial level, the immersive environment was constructed to reconnect the body with historical memory through a "being there" experience. At the annotation level, knowledge was conveyed through lightweight, embedded notes. Lengthy academic exposition was avoided, and simple, comprehensible sentences were used instead. This approach aligned with the logic of visitors "supplementing cognition through perception," allowing knowledge transfer to occur naturally as a result of the interaction between the field and habitus, rather than imposing a cognitive burden.

IV. Conclusion

In traditional museum spaces, abstract symbols and spatial detachment often cause a misalignment between visitors' habitus and their spatial perception. Such misalignment can lead to cognitive obstacles and superficial engagement. The semi-panorama *The Chongqing Bombing* offers an important reference for resolving this issue. Its approach combines everyday visual symbols, immersive spatial arrangements, and concise, strategically placed annotations. The key lies in designing museum spaces without relying on a one-way flow of information. Starting from visitors' habitus, a dialectical adaptation between field and habitus was implemented. This approach allows cognitive burden to be minimized, enabling historical understanding to emerge naturally through familiar experiences and embodied spatial interaction. The lessons from this semi-panorama suggest that museum exhibitions can move beyond simple transmission of information. Meaning and emotional resonance can be facilitated, and the depth and effectiveness of historical and cultural communication can be strengthened.

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The Architectural Types and Cultural Connotations of Esoteric Buddhism in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Region[1]

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Abstract: As a significant cultural region in northern China, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Region, with its unique geographical location and historical-cultural background, has provided favorable conditions for the spread and development of Esoteric Buddhism of Chinese Tradition. Esoteric Buddhist architecture in this region exhibits distinct localized characteristics, making it a valuable sample for studying religious dissemination and adaptive architectural design. Due to the profound and abstruse doctrines of Esoteric Buddhism, coupled with the widespread tendency of integration between Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism after the Tang Dynasty, many Esoteric Buddhist buildings were often integrated into the system of Exoteric Buddhist temples, and their characteristics gradually became vague and indistinguishable. This study takes the mandala cosmic schema as its theoretical framework, integrates methodologies such as iconological analysis, textual research, and field investigation, and systematically examines the spatial practice and formal evolution of Esoteric Buddhist architecture in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Region by sorting out the development context and regional transformation characteristics of such architecture.

Keywords: Esoteric Buddhist architecture; Type comparison; Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei; Cultural integration; Mandala; Vajra world

Introduction

The Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Region has been a core area for the spread of Buddhism since ancient times. The architecture of Han - transmitted Esoteric Buddhism is a creative combination of Esoteric Buddhist doctrines and Han - region architecture, forming a rich artistic landscape of Buddhist architecture in the Beijing - Tianjin - Hebei region and preserving a complete sequence of Han - transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture from the Tang and Song Dynasties to the Ming and Qing Dynasties. However, after the events of Emperor Wuzong of Tang's persecution of Buddhism (841 - 846) and Emperor Shizong of Later Zhou's persecution of Buddhism (955), Tang Dynasty Esoteric Buddhist architecture and related documents were almost destroyed, and there is a lack of empirical evidence. There is controversy over whether many ancient buildings contain Esoteric Buddhist semantics. At present, the academic community's definition of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture is ambiguous, and systematic research achievements are relatively scarce. The relevant research on the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region mainly focuses on buildings with obvious Esoteric Buddhist charac-

teristics, such as Dharani sutra pillars. There is less attention paid to other types of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture in this region, such as Miyan towers and pavilion halls. The renowned scholar Mr. Fang Yong once mentioned in the 1990s that "the second impact of Western architectural culture brought about by Esoteric Buddhism has not been given sufficient attention by the academic community so far". [2] The architectural theorist Pitera once emphasized that "architectural typology needs to decode both the material form and the spiritual will simultaneously". [3] Esoteric Buddhist architecture is like a code book written in brick and wood. The structural grammar has been cracked but have not yet have cracked its structural grammar but have not yet understood its religious semantics. This paper conducts a mutually verifying study by combining the archaeological discoveries of Esoteric Buddhist sites in China and abroad with documentary records, focuses on investigating the localization characteristics of mandala elements in the Buddhist architecture of this region, makes a comparison of Chinese and foreign types, reveals the special forms of the localization of Esoteric Buddhism in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, and outlines this unique architectural type on the eastward extension of

the “Silk Road”. This will contribute to the understanding of the mutual learning among civilizations in the context of the “Belt and Road Initiative” and has special significance for the political history, the history of religious architecture, and traditional Chinese culture.

1 The Origin and Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Architecture

1.1 The Mandala Cosmic Model

Mandala is derived from Sanskrit and is translated into Chinese as “altar city”. It originated from the altars in ancient India, and the ancient Indian scripture *Vedas*[4] narrates the myth of the formation of Mandala. The *Manusmriti of Brahmanism*[5] in the 2nd century BC records that the picture depicting the Mandala dojo is an altar-type building with a combination of squares and circles, symmetrical along the cross-axis, and divided into nine palaces, with the core symbol being the “model of Mount Sumeru in the universe”.[6] Religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Shintoism all adopt this cosmology: The world spreads horizontally with Mount Sumeru as the center, surrounded by seawater, mountains, the four great continents, and forms a closed space with the Iron Encircling Mountains as the outermost boundary. Vertically, it has a basic structure of overlapping wheels of wind, water, gold, and earth, with the three realms of Desire, Form, and Formlessness arranged in a total of thirty-three heavens (Figure 1.1). Esoteric Buddhism has absorbed this worldview of Brahmanism: When Esoteric Buddhists practice Dharma, they build an earthen altar to prevent the invasion of “demonic crowds” from heterodox. Various Buddha statues are placed in the center to represent the gathering of all Buddhas or the completeness of the wheel of perfection. Mandala altars all have a basic framework of “square inside and round outside”. The center is the main deity (such as Vairocana Buddha), and the periphery is surrounded by

symbolic elements such as flames, vajras, and lotus flowers, representing the order and sacredness of the Buddha’s realm, and serving as a cosmic model for practitioners to visualize. The Mahabodhi Stupa (Mahayana Buddhism), which was built in the 5th - 6th centuries, highlights the cosmology of Mount Sumeru as the center of the world. On this basis, Esoteric Buddhism transformed it into a Vajrasana Pagoda. The seven-story pyramidal main tower retains the cosmic symbolic meaning of Hindu temples, and the exterior - decorated Esoteric Buddhist statues were added in later generations (the 9th - 11th centuries), reflecting the new form of temple architecture under Esoteric Buddhist rituals (Figure 2.3).[7] After Esoteric Buddhism was introduced to the Central Plains in the east, it formed an independent sect system during the Kaiyuan period of the Tang Dynasty. The silk paintings of the two Mandalas of the Womb Realm and the Diamond Realm, which were spread to and preserved in Japan, demonstrate the cosmology of Esoteric Buddhism with their precise composition (Figure 1.2). Many mural paintings of the transformation of the Avalokiteshvara Sutra in the Mogao Caves, especially the Mandala illustration of the Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara sitting cross-legged on Mount Sumeru, confirm the standardized dissemination of Esoteric Buddhist images (Figure 1.3). The Mount Sumeru Mandala altar in Tibetan Buddhism, as a 3D presentation of the spatial philosophy of Esoteric Buddhism, is in the same lineage as Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhism (Figure 1.4 & 1.5).

1.2 The Formation of Esoteric Buddhist Architecture in India

In the mid-7th century, two major Esoteric Buddhist sects emerged successively in Indian Buddhism. It is generally believed that the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* originated in southwest India in the first half of the 7th century, while the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra* originated in southeast India at the end of the 7th century.[8] From the 8th to the 12th century, Indian Buddhism prevailed in the Pala Dynasty[9] of eastern India. During

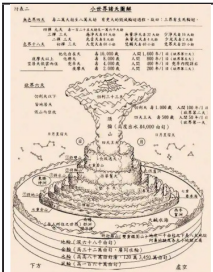
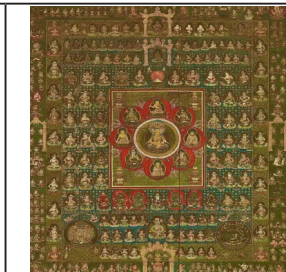
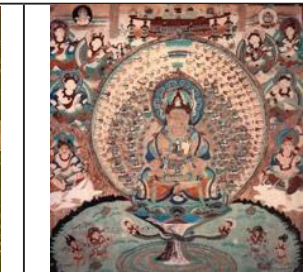
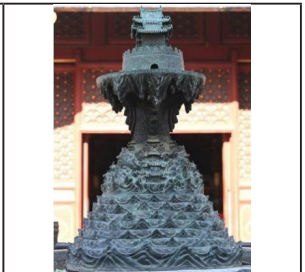
				
1.1 Diagram of the Heavens in the Buddhist Small World	1.2 Japan, the Kamakura period (1185 - 1333) Tang and Five Dynasties periods (9th C - 10th C) Name: Mandala (altar city) Origin: Mogao Caves Library Cave (Cave 17) Collection place: Stein’s Dunhuang paintings collected by the British Museum, UKNumber: 1919,0101,0.174 Ch.00186	1.3 Manjushri Mandala in Cave 361 of the Mogao Caves in the Middle Tang Dynasty.Picture source: <i>Complete Collection of Dunhuang Grotto Art, Esoteric Buddhist Paintings/Compiled by the Dunhuang Academy.</i> - Shanghai: Tongji University Press, January 2016, Page 72	1.4 Gilt-bronze Cloisonné Mandala in Chengde Mountain Resort. Picture source: Self-taken by the author	1.5 Bronze Mount Sumeru in Yonghegong Lama Temple, Beijing. Picture source: Sohu.com. « <i>Perspectives on Construction: A Brief Account of Mount Sumeru in Ancient Architecture</i> », published in July 2023.

Figure 1. Mandala

Temple Name	Period	Location	Central Main Hall
Nalanda Temple	The early 5th century (Gupta Era)	Bihar Pradesh, India	Cross-shaped Central Temple
Uddandapura Temple	8th century (the First Gopala Dynasty)	Bihar Pradesh, India	Cross-shaped Central Temple Building
Vikramasila	8th century (the Second Dharmapala Dynasty)	Bihar Pradesh, India	The center is the Avalokiteshvara Hall; it is a square-shaped temple
Somapuri Temple	9th-12th centuries (the Third Devapala Dynasty)	Bahapur Ruins, Northern Bangladesh	Cross-shaped Central Temple Building
Natishvara Ruins	8th century (Deva Dynasty, 750-800 AD)	Vikrampur Ancient City, East-Central Bangladesh	Octagonal Cross-shaped Central Temple Building
Vajrasana Temple	Founded in the 5th-6th centuries (Gupta Dynasty); Reconstructed in the 13th century (by Burmese Kings)	Southern Bihar Pradesh	Great Vajrasana Stupa

Table 1. Esoteric Buddhist Vajrayana Temples in India

this period, Buddhism itself developed into a new stage—the Esoteric Buddhist Vajrayana stage. Nalanda Temple was transformed into an academic center of Vajrayana and became an important ritual site for Esoteric Buddhism (Figure 2.1). Three famous Vajrayana Temples were also founded: Vikramasila Temple, Uddandapura Temple, and Somapuri Temple. Each of these temples was comparable in scale to Nalanda, and together they were known as the “Four Great Temples of Indian Buddhism (Esoteric Buddhism)”. The center of each temple featured a cross-shaped main hall (Table 1).

In November 2017, Researcher Chai Huanbo from the Hunan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology led a team to Bangladesh, where they joined hands with the Oitihya Onneswan Archaeological Research Center to conduct a joint archaeological excavation at the Nateshwar Ruins of the ancient Vikrampur City. A cross-shaped central temple built around 929-979 AD was unearthed (Figure 2.4). This fully open cross-shaped central temple with five Buddhas is distinctly different from the traditional Mahayana temples in India. It is a brand-new creation of Vajrayana Buddhism and can be called “Vajrayana Architecture”. [10] This cross-shaped central temple structure spread to Tibet, Nepal, Indonesia and other regions along with the dissemination of Vajrayana doctrines, forming “mandala-style” architectural complexes. Examples include the Uzi Main Hall of Samye Temple in Tibet, the Langbalangze Lhakhang of Tholing Temple, the Kumbum Stupa of Palcho Temple, the Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal, and the Borobudur on the island of Java, Indonesia. All of these are regional variations of this mandala architecture (Figure 2).

1.3 The Core Spatial Vocabulary of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist Architecture

The essential characteristic of Han-transmitted Esoteric

Buddhist Architecture lies in that its spatial composition follows the mandala system in Esoteric Buddhist doctrines. Kūkai’s *Secret Storehouse Notes* and other classics regard the mandala as a “cosmic model,” whose spatial structure directly influences the layout of temples. This cosmic schema originating from India has materialized through the spatial layout of architecture, the arrangement of statues, and decorative symbols. Its core characteristics are manifested as follows: A mandala-style planar layout, which forms a centripetal spatial structure with the main hall as the center. The “Zhongtai Bayuan” (Eight Courts Around the Central Platform) corresponds to the building complex along the central axis of the temple. A three-dimensional practice space, where vertical ritual procedures are realized through pavilion-style buildings. For example, the “Five Buddhas and Five Wisdoms” system of the Vajra Realm Mandala influences the hierarchical design of the Five-story Pagoda. A symbolic decoration system, which transforms doctrines into visual artistic forms. Ritual spaces with specific functions, such as dedicated venues like the homa altar and abhisheka altar. The core characteristics of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist Architecture include mandala layout, guardian deity statues, and Esoteric-Exoteric integrated structure. It not only retains the religious symbols of Indian Esoteric Buddhism but also achieves localization through the architectural language of the Han region.

2 Historical Context: The Introduction and Localization of Esoteric Buddhist Architecture

2.1 Political Strategies of the Central Court

The prosperity of Buddhism is often closely tied to the polit-

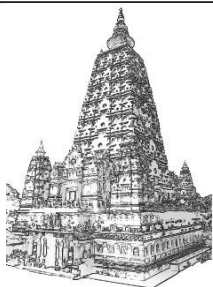
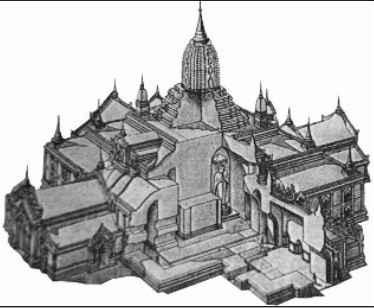
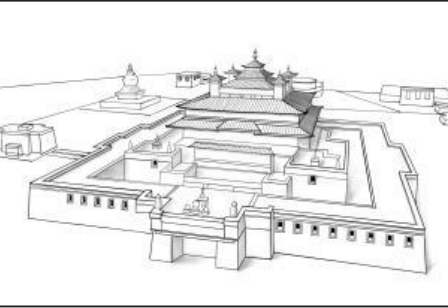
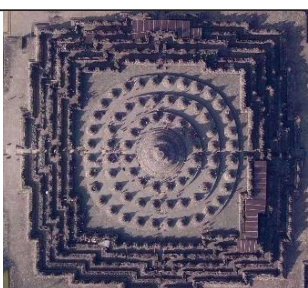
		
2.1 7th century, Nalanda Mahavihara Site. Source: Nalanda in India, People's Pictorial, 2019-08-13. http://article.xuexi.cn/	2.2 8th – 13th centuries, Vikramasila Temple. Image Source: Weibo account of @Hanjiang. 2024-06-11. https://weibo.com/1260849850/OiwFdCsed	2.3 5th – 6th centuries (reconstructed in the 12th century), Mahabodhi Stupa. Image Source: Drawn by Dong Qingxin
		
2.4 Late 8th Century – Early 13th Century, Nateshwar Ruins of Ancient Vikramapura City. Image Source: China News Service. Photographed by Jia Yingjie / Guangming Images	2.5 Reconstruction Map of Bahapur Temple Building. Image Source: Chai Huanbo / Wenbo China	2.6 8th century, Samye Temple. Image Source: CNU. Studio 105
		
2.7 8th Century AD, Borobudur in Indonesia. Image Source: https://www.sohu.com/a/722062356_121124399	2.8 Late 10th Century, Langbalangze Lhakhang of Tholing Temple. Image Source: Official Weibo Account of Culture and Tourism Bureau of Ngari Prefecture, Tibet. https://weibo.com/u/2254916223	2.9 Kumbum Stupa of Palcho Temple (founded in 1414). Image Source: Zhihu. https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/616836262?utm_id=0

Figure 2. Mandala Architecture

ical strategies of rulers, and it was a common tactic for rulers to legitimize their governing status by deifying it through religious power. Therefore, with the strong promotion of the Central Court, Esoteric Buddhist Architecture—acting as the materialized expression of doctrines—was rapidly constructed in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. During the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty, Esoteric Buddhism was revered as the state religion. It became a prominent state-protecting Dharma gate of the Tang Dynasty and flourished vigorously. In the 27th year of the Kaiyuan era (739 AD), Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty issued an imperial edict, ordering that each prefecture across the realm establish a Kaiyuan Temple. These temples served as state-protecting ritual venues for national ceremonies, with a hall dedicated to Vairocana Buddha (i.e., Mahāvairocana Buddha) and a mandala altar built within them. The Esoteric

Buddhist scripture *The Sūtra of the Bodhisattva Lion Sovereign Majestic Inquiring* records: “A square altar, named mandala, shall be erected at the ritual venue, with its size adjusted according to circumstances.” Based on this, Kaiyuan Temples, as state-sponsored state-protecting ritual venues, naturally incorporated Esoteric Buddhist elements. *Zhenyuan Catalogue* records that in the 13th year of the Tianbao era (754 AD), Esoteric Buddhist master Amoghavajra established a mandala ritual venue at Kaiyuan Temple in Liangzhou, where he conducted abhisheka ceremonies and translated scriptures. [11] The connection between Esoteric Buddhism and Kaiyuan Temples is thus obvious. According to research, a total of 85 cases of Kaiyuan Temples from the Tang Dynasty have been identified in various documents, distributed across 85 prefectures.[12] At least 10 Tang Kaiyuan Temples in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region have been recorded in historical

documents: there were Kaiyuan Temple (Fayuan Temple) and Shunyi Kaiyuan Temple in Youzhou; Kaiyuan Temple in Yixian County, Kaiyuan Temple in Zhengding County, Kaiyuan Temple in Zhaoxian County, and Kaiyuan Temple in Dingzhou in central Hebei; and Kaiyuan Temple in Xingtai City, Kaiyuan Temple in Jizhou City, Kaiyuan Temple in Weizhou City, and Kaiyuan Temple in Cangzhou City in southern Hebei. Most of these Kaiyuan Temples still retain Esoteric Buddhist relics today, such as Dhvaja pillars (Jingchuang), inscriptions of Dhāraṇī Sūtras, and multi-eaved pagodas. Another Esoteric Buddhist temple constructed by imperial order in the Tang Dynasty was Tianwang Temple. According to *The Rituals of Vaiśravaṇa* translated by the Tang-era monk Amoghavajra, in the first year of the Tianbao era of the Tang Dynasty (742 AD), the city of Anxi (present-day Kuqa County, Xinjiang) was besieged by foreign troops. Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty (Li Longji) ordered Amoghavajra to perform rituals to invoke Vaiśravaṇa, the Northern Heavenly King, to lead divine soldiers for rescue. In an instant, the city of Anxi shook violently, divine soldiers descended from heaven, and the foreign troops were thoroughly defeated. This record is undoubtedly a mythological legend. However, Li Longji used this to claim that he had received assistance from the Heavenly King, and thus issued an imperial edict ordering that Vaiśravaṇa, the Heavenly King, be enshrined at the north gates of all prefectural and county cities. A Tianwang Temple was also built north of Youzhou City, which is today's Tianning Temple in Beijing. Emperor Daizong of the Tang Dynasty continued to venerate Esoteric Buddhism. In the 11th year of the Dali era (776 AD), he issued an imperial edict ordering all monks and nuns across the country to recite the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of Supreme Victory* 21 times daily, and to report the total number of recitations on the first day of the first lunar month each year. Thus, the Supreme Victory Dhāraṇī spread to temples throughout the land. A large number of Dhvaja pillars inscribed with the Supreme Victory Dhāraṇī from the Tang and Liao Dynasty found in the Yanjing region serve as material evidence for this historical record.[13]

After the Song and Liao Dynasty concluded the Chanyuan Alliance, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region entered a peaceful development period lasting over a century. Both the Northern Song Dynasty in the south and the Liao Dynasty in the north built Buddhist temples in border areas and took exchanging envoys to visit each other's major temples as a form of etiquette. Thus, temples became a means for both sides to demonstrate their national strength. The Liao Dynasty, which ruled northern China, carried forward the legacy of Esoteric Buddhism from the Tang Dynasty. The royal family's emphasis on and preference for Esoteric Buddhism promoted its popularity in the Yanjing region, leading to an unprecedented boom in the construction of Esoteric Buddhist temples. Master Daochenshu's *Collection on the Essentials of Achieving Buddhahood through the Unification of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism* simplified Tang Dynasty Esoteric Buddhism and integrated Huayan Buddhism with Esoteric Buddhism, form-

ing a localized Chinese Esoteric Buddhist thought with characteristics of the era.[14] Following the Tang Dynasty, a large number of multi-eaved pagodas that integrate both Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism within the Liao Dynasty's territory represent another construction boom in the development of Esoteric Buddhist architecture in the northern Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. The Song Dynasty, which ruled southern China, also attached great importance to supporting Buddhism. It established a Scripture Translation Institute, translated many Esoteric Buddhist scriptures, and for the first time, the government took the lead in compiling and publishing the *Buddhist Canon*—an undertaking that included a great deal of Esoteric Buddhist content. This promoted the spread of Esoteric Buddhism and enabled its revival and development. However, the Song Dynasty adopted a policy of integrating Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism. Although, with the promotion of the imperial court, Esoteric Buddhist beliefs became widely popular among all social classes in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the construction of Esoteric Buddhist buildings was basically integrated into Exoteric Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism still held significant influence during the Jin Dynasty. Among the Jin-era stone carvings at Yunju Temple in Fangshan, Esoteric Buddhist texts accounted for an extremely high proportion—this reflects that Esoteric Buddhism was still valued by the government during the reign of Emperor Zhangzong. During the Jin Dynasty, Buddhist architecture in North China generally showed a “Sinicization” trend, and the characteristics of Esoteric Buddhist architecture were not prominent. Kublai Khan, Emperor Shizu of the Yuan Dynasty, honored Phags-pa as the Imperial Preceptor and established Tibetan Buddhism as the state religion, forming a “unity of religion and politics” model whose influence extended to the Ming and Qing Dynasty. Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist temples, having lost political support, gradually declined. Esoteric Buddhism did not form an independent sect in the Ming Dynasty. However, Cishou Temple, Wanshou Temple, and Dahui Temple—all constructed by imperial order of the Ming royal family—contained abundant Esoteric Buddhist elements. Together, these temples reveal the systematic absorption of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhism by the Ming imperial court. In the Qing Dynasty, Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhism mainly attached itself to the system of integrating Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism, and it was still valued by the imperial court—an example being the Foxiang Pavilion in the Summer Palace.

2.2 The Construction Efforts by Esoteric Buddhist Masters

From the Western Jin Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region served as a Buddhist sacred site. It witnessed frequent Esoteric Buddhist activities, and historical records on the deeds of relevant Buddhist monks are quite abundant. During the Western Jin Dynasty, Fotucheng (232-348), a master of Esoteric mantras from the Western Regions, traveled to Xiangguo (present-day Xingtai City). He received

strong support from Shi Le, Emperor of the Zhao State, for promoting Buddhist teachings, and spread Buddhism across various parts of Hebei. “He established 893 Buddhist temples in all the prefectures and counties he passed through.”[15] According to records in *Biographies of Monks*, he was associated with many miraculous events. He was skilled in reciting divine mantras, practiced both Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism, and was widely venerated. Thanks to his influence, Esoteric mantras gradually became known to the world. In the early years of the Yuanjia era of the Song Dynasty (426 AD), Dharmamitra, a monk from the Western Regions, arrived in Jianye. He translated *The Sutra of the Divine Mantra of Akasagarbha Bodhisattva* in one scroll and transmitted the portrait of Kapila[16], a deity in Esoteric Buddhism. Lingyu of the Northern Qi Dynasty was a native of Dingzhou. The people of Xiangzhou called him “Bodhisattva Yu,” and he enjoyed great fame in Hebei. In the 10th year of the Kaihuang era, Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty intended to appoint him as the “Guotong” (national leader) of Buddhism. In the 9th year of the Kaihuang era, he protected the Dharma and engraved Buddhist scriptures in the Baoshan Grottoes. On the walls on both sides of the grotto entrance, Esoteric Buddhist deities such as Vaiśravaṇa and Kapila were carved. This grotto is also known as the “Narayana Grotto Maintained by the Vajra Nature and Power”.

Yi Xing[17], the Second Patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty, was a native of Julu in Hebei. He was the first Han monk to obtain the qualification of holding an altar for abhiṣeka (initiation) and accepting disciples. According to Huang Chunhe in *A Study of Buddhist Temples in Youzhou City During the Sui and Tang Dynasties*, Yi Xing, a leader of Esoteric Buddhism, once visited Youzhou. *The Unified Gazetteer of the Yuan Dynasty* states that Yi Xing once founded Xingshan Temple[18] within Youzhou City. Yi Xing inherited both the Matrix Realm (Garbhadhātu) and the Vajra Realm (Vajradhātu) of Esoteric practices and integrated the two into one system. He had a profound influence on the spread of Esoteric Buddhism in China and was worthy of being regarded as a great virtuous master of Esoteric Buddhism. During the Kaiyuan era of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty (713-741 AD), Yi Xing compiled *The Commentary on the Mahāvairocana Sutra*—an authoritative work on Esoteric Buddhism—in twenty scrolls. This marked the beginning of the formal transmission of Chinese Esoteric Buddhism.[19] Although there are few records of Yi Xing’s activities in Hebei, the incident of his temple construction in Youzhou proves that Esoteric Buddhist buildings already existed in Youzhou at that time.

During the Northern Song Dynasty, the Anuttarayoga Tantra school emerged in India. A large number of monks came to China, bringing Esoteric Buddhist scriptures and rituals to the Han-inhabited regions. These monks exerted great influence among the people and had many followers. Major Buddhist temples established Esoteric Buddhist ritual sites and fre-

quently practiced Esoteric rituals. As recorded in *The Stele Inscription of the Divine Pagoda for Sakyamuni’s Sarira Built by Imperial Decree* compiled by Monk Ruyi Xiangmai of the Yuan Dynasty, Dao’an presided over the construction of the “Divine Pagoda for Sakyamuni’s Sarira” at Yong’an Temple in the 2nd year of the Shouchang era (1096 AD). The enshrinement of the sarira in the pagoda was arranged by him in accordance with Esoteric Buddhist rituals. He practiced both Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism throughout his life and was conferred the title of “Master of the Unification of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism” by Emperor Tianyou. He summarized his lifelong cultivation achievements and left *Collection on the Essentials of Achieving Buddhahood through the Unification of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism* for later generations.

The prosperity of Esoteric Buddhism in the Liao Dynasty not only saw the emergence of many temples and monks dedicated to spreading Esoteric Buddhism but also witnessed the integration of Esoteric Buddhism with other Buddhist sects, forming the distinctive feature of combining Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism declined in the late Liao Dynasty. During the Jin Dynasty, the documented figures associated with it included Fachong and Zhiling. Zhiling learned the Dharani method from Shaolin Temple on Songshan Mountain. Later, during the Huangtong era (1141–1149 AD), he resided at Ganhua Temple on Panshan Mountain in Hebei and specialized in propagating Esoteric Buddhism. It is said that Fachong defeated the Taoist priest Xiao Shouzheng in a contest of strength in the 3rd year of the Dading era (1163 AD). The propagation of Esoteric Buddhism in Zhongdu (the capital of the Jin Dynasty) still has traces to follow. Its main propagators included Yibing, a great virtuous master specializing in Esoteric teachings from Guijing Temple on Baota Mountain in Zunhua, Jizhou, and his disciple Chenghui. According to records in *Supplementary Continuation of Biographies of Eminent Monks* of the Yuan Dynasty, during the Zhiyuan and Dade eras of the Yuan Dynasty (late 13th century to early 14th century), there was a monk named Zhicheng. He was honored as the Seventh Patriarch, studied the main idea of both Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism, and upheld mantras of various Esoteric texts. He accepted disciples and guided the faithful, and his reputation as a virtuous master grew increasingly prominent. This indicates that Zhicheng promoted traditional Esoteric Buddhism. Yanjing was once a center of Esoteric Buddhism during the Liao Dynasty and even the Jin Dynasty. Tracing back from the Seventh Patriarch, his lineage can be extended to the late Liao Dynasty. The Esoteric Buddhism he transmitted bore the characteristics of Liao Dynasty Esoteric Buddhism and carried the traits of Tang Dynasty Esoteric Buddhism. Since the Yuan Dynasty, Esoteric Buddhist monks have occasionally carried out propagation activities in the Beijing area. However, they ultimately failed to exist as an independent sect because it was difficult to clearly distinguish them from Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism. The development of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhism showed an evolutionary

trajectory of “declining from prosperity and gradually becoming marginalized,” and the dissemination of Tang Dynasty Esoteric translations was limited to the imperial court and the circle of a small number of eminent monks. A mixed phenomenon emerged in Han-region temples, where Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist and Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist statues and rituals coexisted. Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhism gradually lost its independence, and Esoteric Buddhism became generalized and integrated into Exoteric Buddhism.

3 Types and Cultural Connotations of Han-Transmitted Esoteric Buddhist Architecture in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei Region.

3.1 Pavilion - Threefold Cultivation Space

During the Miscellaneous Esotericism period, Vidyadhara Esoteric Buddhism encompassed scriptural and ritual lineages, including the Manjushri and Guanyin categories. After the eighth century, Esoteric Buddhism increasingly revered Guanyin Bodhisattva; with further translations by Tang Dynasty esoteric masters, a systematized corpus of Guanyin esoteric scriptures took shape (Table 2). In many temples, Guanyin pavilions are often built as separate structures, within which a monumental standing statue of Guanyin is enshrined. Such monumental standing statues required the construction

of tall, hollow buildings, directly spurring the development of multi-story timber architecture. Among historically recorded pavilion-style Buddhist halls of the greatest height and scale, the foremost is the “Heavenly Hall” built in Luoyang in 695 by Empress Wu Zetian of the Tang Dynasty. According to historical records, its height reached “one thousand chi”; the enormous Buddha statue filled the building’s interior, with such tall and narrow architectural space serving to accentuate the Buddha’s greatness and immeasurability. According to documentary records, Jinge Temple at Mount Wutai—the Esoteric Buddhist center petitioned by Amoghavajra and erected by imperial decree of Tang Emperor Daizong—was built under the supervision of Master Chunyue of Nalanda Temple in India. The construction followed canonical architectural and ritual prescriptions, and its principal structure, the Guanyin Hall dedicated to the Thousand-Armed and Thousand-Eyed Avalokiteśvara, was a grand three-story pavilion-style great Buddha Hall. Multiple extant examples of such grand Guanyin halls remain; notable ones include the Great Compassion Pavilion of Longxing Temple in Zhengding, Hebei; the Guanyin Pavilion of Dule Temple in Ji County, Tianjin; and the Great Buddha Hall of Dahui Temple in Beijing (Figures 3-1, 3-2, 3-3).

In his book *Research on Esoteric Buddhism in Dunhuang during the Period of Tibetan Rule*, Dr. Zhao Xiaoxing points out that there are two Tang Dynasty translations concerning the Esoteric Buddhist “Jeweled Pavilion”: one by Amoghavajra, the *Sutra of the Well-Abiding Secret Dharani of the Great Treasure Extensive Pavilion*, and another by Bodhiruci, the

Amoghapāśa	Eleven-Faced Guanyin	Thousand-Armed Guanyin (Great Compassion)	Bodhisattva Manjushri
<i>The Scripture of the Mantra of the Unfailing Lasso</i> , translated by Jnānagupta in the Sui Dynasty.	In the fourth year of Baoding of the Northern Zhou (564), Yasogupta translated the <i>Eleven-Faced Guanyin Divine Spell Sutra</i> .	In the Tang Dynasty, Bhagavaddharma translated the <i>Sutra of the Great Compassion Heart Dharani of the Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Guanyin Bodhisattva, Vast, Perfect, and Unobstructed</i> .	In the Tang Dynasty, Bodhiruci translated the <i>Sutra of the Dharani of Manjushri’s Treasury of the Dharma</i> .
<i>The Heart Sutra of the Divine Spell of the Unfailing Lasso</i> , translated by Xuanzang in the Tang dynasty.	In the first year of Xianqing of the Tang (656), Xuanzang translated the <i>Heart Sutra of the Eleven-Faced Divine Spell</i> .	Amoghavajra translated the <i>Sutra on the Vajra Peak Yoga Ritual Procedure for the Practice of the Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Guanyin Bodhisattva</i> .	Amoghavajra translated the important <i>Esoteric Buddhist scripture The Sutra on the Adornment of the Meritorious Virtues of the Buddha-Land by the Great Sage Manjushri Bodhisattva</i> .
<i>The Scripture of the Miraculous Transformation Mantra of the Unfailing Lasso</i> , translated by Amoghavajra.	Amoghavajra of the Tang Dynasty translated the <i>Ritual Procedure for Recitation of the Esoteric Heart Mantra of the Eleven-Faced Guanyin</i> .	In the Tang Dynasty, Sanmei Suwoluo translated <i>The Sutra of the Secret Method of the Thousand-Light-Eyed Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva as Spoken by the Buddha</i> .	Amoghavajra translated the <i>Ritual Procedure for Offering to Manjushri Bodhisattva in the Yoga of the Vajra Peak Sutra</i> .
			Amoghavajra translated the <i>Vajra Peak Sutra on Surpassing the Three Realms: On the Superior Signs of Manjushri’s Five-Syllable Mantra</i> .

Table 2. Translations of Avalokitesvara-category Esoteric Buddhist scriptures

Sutra of the Well-Abiding Secret Dharani of the Vast Jeweled Pavilion, both of which mention the corresponding altar rites. The “Jeweled Pavilion Mandala” is a central great Buddha pavilion with mandalic characteristics, generally constructed as a three-story structure. Within the Esoteric Buddhist system, a three-tiered space often corresponds to the vertical stages of cultivation, such as the “three mysteries” of body, speech, and mind, or the threefold realms of the Womb Realm Mandala. Built in the eighth century, the great Esoteric Buddhist temple Samye—also called the “San Yang Temple”—features a three-story Utse Hall at the central, with each story designed in a distinct architectural style, which is also called the “Sanyang Pavilion” or the “Three-Style.” The great hall of the Akki Temple of Esoteric Buddhism, built in the eleventh century, is likewise three-story structure. At the newly built Tang Esoteric Buddhism Jinge Temple on Mount Wutai, the central Guanyin Pavilion was a three-tiered pavilion-style building; at Fayuan Temple in Youzhou in the Tang Dynasty, the Minzhong Pavilion placed a standing statue of the Great-Compassion Guanyin at its center. *Rixia Jiuwen Kao* records it as “seven bays in width and three stories high.” For example, the three-story Great Compassion Pavilion of Longxing Temple in Zhengding from the Song Dynasty, the Wanfoge (Ten-Thousand-Buddha Pavilion) of the Yonghe Temple in the Qing Dynasty, the Great Buddha Hall of Chanfu Temple in Beihai, and the Tower of Buddhist Incense in the Summer Palace (Figure 3-4) are also three stories, while

the five-story Mahayana Pavilion at Puning Temple is called the “Sanyang Pavilion.” Over a millennium of transformation, the ritual characteristics of the Esoteric Buddhist great pavilion have changed, yet its core symbolic system remains clearly discernible.

In the Great Compassion Pavilion of Longxing Temple, a 21.3-meter-tall bronze-cast statue of the Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Guanyin (Great-Compassion Bodhisattva) is enshrined. Its forty-two arms each hold a ritual implement, embodying the Esoteric Buddhist ideal of “a thousand eyes to observe the world and a thousand hands to protect sentient beings,” in accordance with the Tang Dynasty Esoteric Buddhist scripture, the *Sutra of the Great Compassion Heart Dharani of the Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Guanyin Bodhisattva, Vast, Perfect, and Unobstructed*, translated by Bhagavadharma. The three-story timber-structured Great Compassion pavilion adopts a construction logic of “image-determined pavilion,” with the interior space organized around the colossal bronze statue of the Thousand-Armed Guanyin, forming a 3D mandala structure. The three-tiered galleries employ a “mirror lighting” technique that keeps the face of the Guanyin statue perpetually bathed in soft light, symbolizing the Esoteric Buddhist cultivation state of “light pervading everywhere.” At its initial construction, the Great Compassion Pavilion employed a “golden-casket, dou-base bay-ring” system[20] and a circumferential column grid. The inner bay ring served

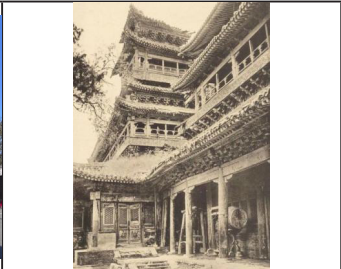
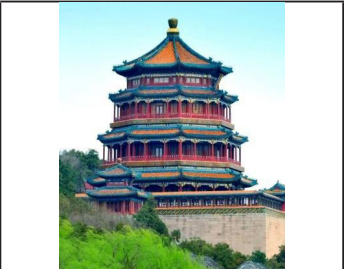
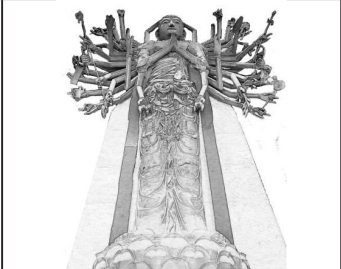
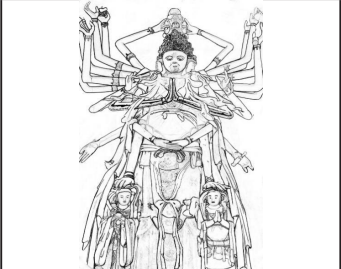
			
3.1 Liao Dynasty Dule Temple — Guanyin Pavilion. Image source: photographed by the author.	3.2 Early 20th century, Longxing Temple — Great Compassion Pavilion. Image source: <i>Shina Cultural Historical Sites</i> .	3.3 Ming Dynasty, Dahuisi — Great Compassion Treasure Hall. Image source: Baijiahao, “Wind Blows Grass Speaks.” July 2020. Old photograph: 1938 Beijing Dahuisi (Great Buddha Temple).	3.4 Qing Dynasty, Summer Palace — Tower of Buddhist Incense of the Great Temple of Gratitude and Longevity. Image source: Baijiahao, Ning Yingjiang, 2025-04.
			
3.5 Dule Temple, Guanyin Pavilion—Ekādaśamukha (Eleven-Headed) Avalokiteśvara. Image source: Lu Yu, digital illustration.	3.6 Bronze-cast statue of the Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Guanyin at Longxing Temple. Image source: Zhang Lin, tablet painting.	3.7 Thousand-Armed Guanyin statue at Beijing Dahuisi, prior to its destruction by fire. Image source: Zhang Lin, tablet painting.	3.8 Ming Dynasty Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Guanyin Bodhisattva at the Tower of Buddhist Incense. Image source: Weibo, “Chanli Chanqu.”

Figure 3. Guanyin Halls and Pavilions

as the central space for the Great-Compassion Bodhisattva, while the outer bay ring functioned as the circumambulatory worship space. The corridor space in the shape of the character hui (回) formed an encircling mode of Buddhist devotion. As an architectural work of an Exoteric Buddhist temple, the Great Compassion Pavilion integrates Esoteric Buddhist construction principles, clearly attesting to the widespread diffusion of Esoteric Buddhist building practices within territories under Song jurisdiction.

Esoteric Buddhist temples in China proper are now exceedingly rare. Dule Temple in Jizhou is likely the sole surviving Liao Dynasty example of an Esoteric Buddhist temple that takes the Eleven-Faced Guanyin as its principal deity. Viewed from the outside, the Guanyin Pavilion appears two-storied, but it contains a concealed intermediate level, making it in fact three stories, in accordance with the Esoteric Buddhist “Three-Style” construction principle. Given that the Eleven-Faced Guanyin at Dule Temple serves as the temple’s principal deity, its sectarian affiliation is obvious. Su Bai’s article, published in the journal *Wenwu* in 1989 pointed out that Dule Temple is an important remnant of a Liao Dynasty Esoteric Buddhist Temple.[21] Throughout the complex, the Guanyin Pavilion (constructed in 984) functions as the main hall, forming a centrally organized, square layout that is both orderly and rigorous. Its essential quadrangular plan recalls that of Jinge Temple—the Tang Dynasty Esoteric Buddhist temple on Mount Wutai—which exemplifies the architectural typology of Tang–Liao Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist monastic design. At the outside chamber of the Shanmen (main gate), two statues of Vajra Guardians are enshrined, while within the inner chamber stand the Four Heavenly Kings. This arrangement corresponds precisely to the ritual prescription described in the *Guangda baolouge shanzhu mimi tuoluoni jing (Sutra of the Vast Jeweled Pavilion and the Well-Abiding Secret Dhāraṇī)*, which states: “The two protectors on the left and right are Vajrapāṇi Bodhisattva and Mañivajra Bodhisattva, and the four directional guardians are the Four Heavenly Kings.” The interior space of the Guanyin Pavilion is organized around a 16-meter-tall statue of the Eleven-Faced Guan-

yin, forming a complete ritual circuit. On the walls flanking the entrance are paintings of two Esoteric Buddhist Wisdom Kings (Figure 4). The remaining wall paintings depict the Sixteen Arhats. The names of the Sixteen Arhats first appear in Xuanzang’s translation *Record of the Abiding of the Dharma as Spoken by the Great Arhat Nandimitra*, which bears an intellectual lineage linked to Esoteric Buddhist thought. In the *Five Hundred Arhats* in Southern Song Dynasty, the piece *Emanational Guanyin* portrays the Eleven-Faced Guanyin manifesting, attended by four arhats on either side, indicating that by the Song Dynasty the arhats had already been incorporated into the Esoteric Buddhist pantheon. With respect to the verification of the square dimensional characteristics of Dule Temple, Wang Nan of the School of Architecture at Tsinghua University authored a dedicated article, “*Rules and the Square-and-Circle, Measuring the Image to Build the Structure—An Analysis of the Compositional Proportions of the Guanyin Pavilion, Shanmen, and Sculptures at Dule Temple in Jixian*,” which points out that the spacing between the Shanmen and the Guanyin Pavilion, together with the pavilion’s platform base and overall frontage, constitutes an approximately square composition. This further confirms that



Figure 4. Square Mandala Great Hall

4.1 Guanyin Hall of Kaiyuan Temple, Yixian	4.2 Manjushri Hall of Geyuan Temple	4.3 Vairocana Hall of Yunju Temple, Beijing	4.4 Qinglong Temple, Site No. 4 (Early Phase)	4.5 Qutan Temple in Qinghai (Tibetan Buddhist tradition)

Figure 4. Square Mandala Great Hall

it is a typical Esoteric Buddhist mandala characterized by cruciform symmetry and a pronounced center.

In Laiyuan, Hebei, the Great Hall of Manjusri at Geyuan Temple was constructed during the Liao Dynasty. The development of Manjushri devotion in the central mainland is closely connected with Esoteric Buddhism: “one of the salient features of Esoteric Buddhism is the veneration of Bodhisattva Manjushri and the emphasis on Manjushri’s Esoteric Buddhist methods.” Esoteric Buddhism and Manjushri devotion constitute an organic whole.[22] In the seventh year of Dali (772), after Amoghavajra translated the *Sutra of Manjushri’s Meritorious Virtues*, he submitted a memorial requesting the establishment of Manjushri cloisters throughout the realm, such as the Manjushri Pavilion at Daxingshan Temple in Chang’an. The Liao Dynasty inherited Tang Esoteric Buddhism, and Manjushri devotion became increasingly widespread and emerged as a major hallmark of Liao Buddhism. [23] Manjushri halls, pavilion-temples, and Manjushri terraces arose across various locales. In *Wuxiang Lun*, square sanctuaries and monastic buildings composed of 64, 81, or more or fewer small grid cells are termed mandalas (vāstumandala, square mandala), which are regarded as the dwellings of a principal deity together with his retinue and the temple’s protective deities. The excavated remains of the central main hall at Qinglong Temple—the ancestral seat of Esoteric Buddhism—are square in plan; the central Esoteric Jeweled Light Hall at Qutan Temple in Qinghai, a Sino–Tibetan syncretic

site, is likewise square. In the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region, vestiges of square Esoteric Buddhist great halls survive to this day (Figure 4).

The most salient Esoteric Buddhist features of the Manjushri Hall at Geyuan Temple are its door leaves and window lattices. The sole surviving lattice door uses a three-interlocking six-diagonal pattern, with openwork carvings of Sanskrit letters and Esoteric Buddhist ritual implements such as the vajra bell, vajra (scepter), treasure vase, and blue lotus. The Sanskrit letters encircle the implements, forming a protective mantra configuration with a central sun disc.[24] The letters should be a “dharma mandala.”[25] *The Compendium of Essentials for Attaining Buddhahood through the Perfect Integration of Exoteric and Esoteric Teachings* emphasizes that, in recitation rituals, one must first visualize and chant the Sanskrit letter: this letter is suffused with light, like a luminous pearl or a full moon, able to purify the three karmic activities and eliminate all karmic obstructions. As shown in the figure, the lattice of the central transom window is carved with a three-pronged vajra and a blue lotus, constituting Manjushri Bodhisattva’s “Samaya Mandala”; the imagery of the central transom window chiefly expresses the combined-altar homa rite. The ritual-implement images on the transom windows of the secondary bays to the east and west, by contrast, convey the intention of peripheral protection.

This type of window-lattice carving bears notable similarities to the transom woodcarvings of the Guanyin Hall (now

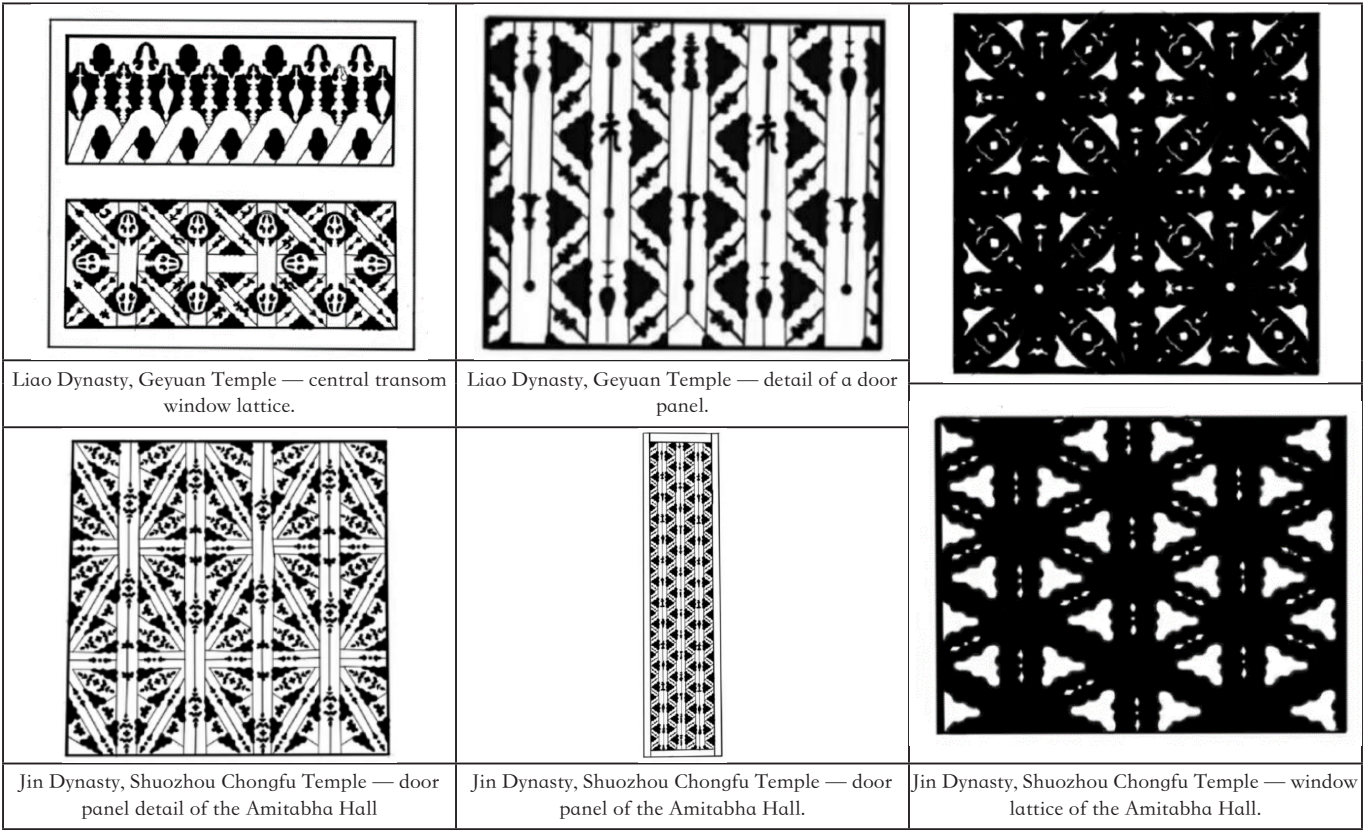


Figure 5. Esoteric Buddhist window lattice (painted by Zhang Yingfang)

destroyed) at Kaiyuan Temple in Yixian, adjacent to Laiyuan County, dating to the late Liao period; it represents a window-lattice type formed under the influence of Esoteric Buddhism (Figure 5). The inscription on *the Stele of the Shakyamuni Relic Pagoda* at Linggan Temple, erected in the sixth year of Tianqing under the Liao Emperor Tianzuo (1116) in Xingzhong Prefecture (present-day Chaoyang, Liaoning Province), states: “Thus, wherever even a single speck is touched and wherever a single shadow is cast, the benefit and joy to the faithful are not in vain!” The notion of “dust touching and shadow covering” is a characteristic expression in the detailed decorative treatment of Esoteric Buddhist architecture.

Dahuisi in Beijing in the Ming Dynasty is a Han-transmitted Buddhist temple. First built in the eighth year of Zhengde (1513), its main hall—the Great Compassion Treasure Hall—has a double-eaved hip roof, five bays in width (approx. 25 m), and three bays in depth (approx. 15 m), oriented north–south (facing south) and employs a typical Ming large-timber structural system. As the highest-ranked form of imperial architecture, the double-eaved hip roof carries symbolic import that resonates potentially with the Esoteric Buddhist cosmology of the “mandala” (tancheng). Within the hall, the principal image is a polychrome standing statue of the Eleven-Faced, Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Guanyin, created in the eighth year of Zhengde (1513), five zhang in height, with figures of a boy acolyte and the Dragon Girl beneath it, and two symmetrically placed attendant bodhisattva standing images in front; along the north wall and the lower sections of the east and west walls are twenty-eight polychrome guardian deities, some holding ritual implements (such as vajra scepters and treasure vases), as well as a Sinicized image of the Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist deity Daheitian (Mahakala). *The Great Compassion Dharani Sutra* records that the Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Guanyin possesses twenty-eight retinue groups and their names. The conception of the ensemble—its combination, arrangement, and layout—is meticulous; encircled by murals on all sides, it forms a “3D mandala” configuration that may imply Esoteric Buddhist mandala thought. The pairing of the principal Thousand-Armed Guanyin with the twenty-eight guardian deities may accord with the cosmological structure of the “Central Terrace Eight-Petaled Court” in the Esoteric Buddhist “Womb-Realm” mandala. The enclosed spatial character of the main hall accords with the mandala spatial concept required for Esoteric Buddhist cultivation and exhibits the features of a self-contained altar space for Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist rites. This high-specification architectural arrangement of the Great Compassion Treasure Hall may well be a unique surviving Ming Dynasty exemplar continued from Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist temple and is exceptionally precious (Figure 3.3).

3.2 Central Cruciform Hall Pagoda

The enclosed cruciform sanctuaries that took shape during the

10th–13th-century Vajrayana phase of Indian Esoteric Buddhism are a concrete embodiment of its cosmology. After Esoteric Buddhism spread to East Asia, the cruciform typology fused with East Asian structural systems, producing Esoteric Buddhist architecture with distinctive Eastern characteristics. The “cruciform” Great Golden Hall at Kongo-ji of Japan’s Shingon Esoteric Buddhism is a representative example of this type (Figures 6.9). It was first built in 816 when Kukai founded the school, and its cruciform design was likely influenced by Tang Dynasty Esoteric Buddhist architecture. The cruciform Mani Hall at Longxing Temple, begun in the fourth year of Huangyou of the Northern Song (1052), stands at the temple’s center; its plan is nearly square, with on each of the four sides a forward-facing hipped-gable “turtle-head” bay projecting outward to form a cross. Western Xia Yulin Cave 3 is a typical Esoteric Buddhist cave, whose murals depict a cruciform building identical to the Mani Hall. Evidently, the cruciform format of the Mani Hall has an inherent connection with Vajrayana and constitutes a new architectural form developed from the mandala under the Song Dynasty context of the integration of Exoteric and Exoteric Buddhism. In the Ming Dynasty, Hebei’s Pilu Temple[26] likewise has at its center a cruciform great hall; within it the principal deity enshrined is Vairocana Buddha (called Mahavairocana in Esoteric Buddhism), the fundamental Buddha of Esoteric Buddhism. The Sanskrit term “Pilu” means “all-pervading light.” The mural images of the Ten Great Wisdom Kings inside the hall (such as Yamantaka) reach up to 1.5 meters in height and employ the Esoteric Buddhist specific iconography of wrathful forms, corroborating the presence of Esoteric Buddhist elements at Pilu Temple. The Pilu Hall adopts a cross-shaped plan (cruciform hip-and-gable roof), with projecting baosha to the front and rear, and is built upon a 1-meter-high yuetai (raised terrace). Evidently, its architectural typology, like that of the Mani Hall, stands in the same lineage as the cruciform great halls of the Vajra Realm at Esoteric Buddhist centers such as Nalanda Temple and Chaojie Temple; viewed in plan from above, their cruciform configurations are strikingly similar (Figure 6).

Many Treasures Pagodas are a form of Esoteric Buddhist architecture. The name derives from the Lotus Sutra and embodies Esoteric Buddhist thought and cosmology. They chiefly appear after the seventh century. In the Middle Tang, the Mogao Caves contain numerous Esoteric Buddhist Many Treasures Pagodas; Cave 361 is an important Middle Tang (Tibetan rule over Dunhuang) Esoteric Buddhist cave. The Many Treasures Pagoda on the west wall symbolizes the fusion of Lotus devotion and Esoteric Buddhist ritual. Within the pagoda is an inner Buddha Hall where Shakyamuni and the Many Treasures Buddha are seated together. The two Buddhas seated together inside expresses the doctrinal principle and embodies the Esoteric Buddhist mandala concept of “Buddha within the stupa.”[27] This exemplifies the integration of Esoteric Buddhist doctrinal principles into the Tang realm. At its four corners stand upright subsidiary pagodas set

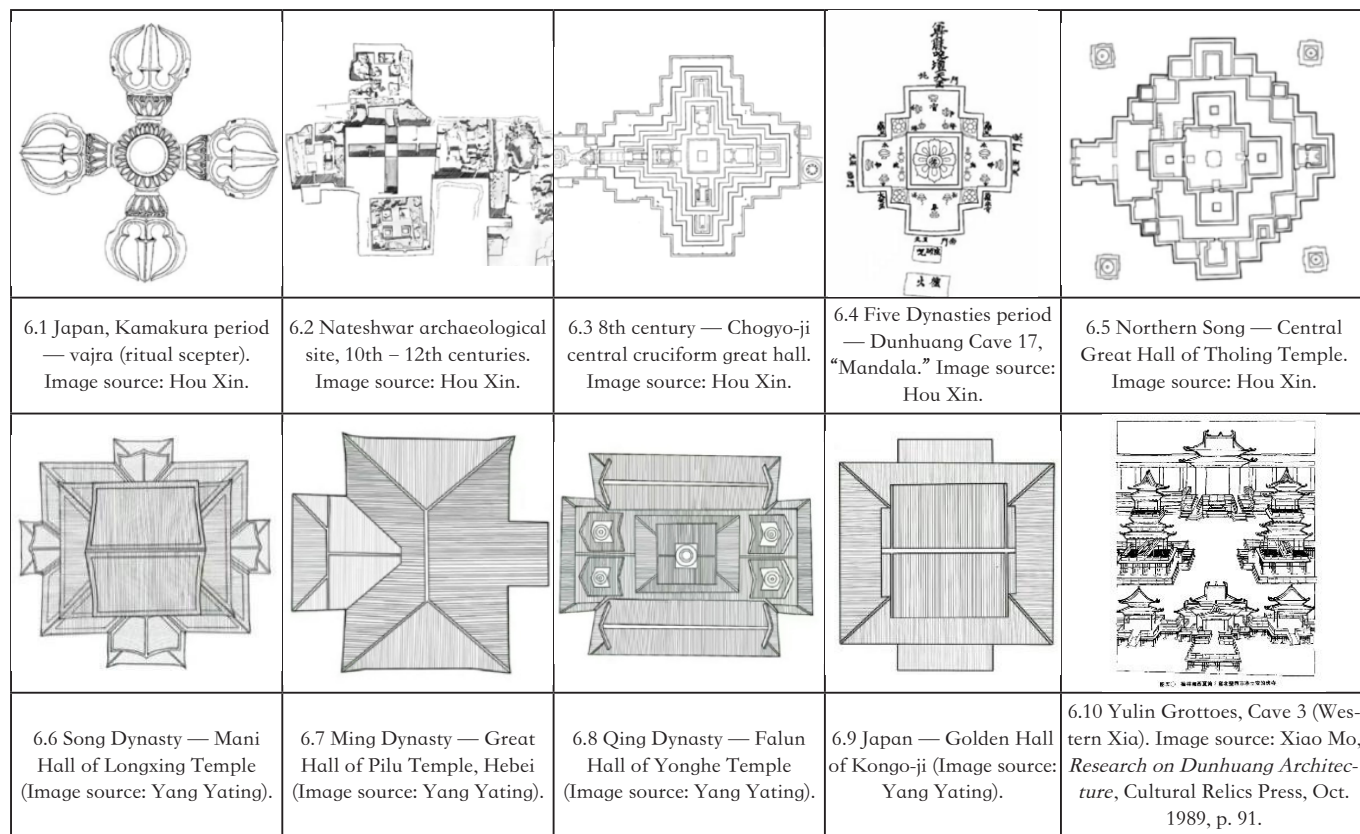


Figure 6. Cruciform Great Hall

on Sumeru pedestals, constituting the style of a Vajra Throne Pagoda. The Flower Pagoda of Guanghui Temple is explicitly recorded as a "Many Treasures Pagoda" in the Record of the Reconstruction of the Jeweled Pagoda from the twelfth year of Wanli in the Ming (1584); the Qing *Gazetteer of Zhengding County* and poems composed by the Qianlong Emperor likewise retain this name, such as "*Guanghui Temple Many Treasures Pagoda on the Day after the Full Moon in the Eleventh Month of Winter*." Among Esoteric Buddhist structures, the most ornate and sumptuous is the Many Treasures Pagoda. In the "*Appearance of the Jeweled Stupa*" chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* it is said: "All beheld Buddha Many Treasures seated upon a lion throne within the jeweled pagoda, his entire body undispersed, as if in meditative absorption." This is likely the symbolic import of the lion images on the first story of the Many Treasures Pagoda, indicating that the pagoda is a concrete embodiment of Buddha Many Treasures preaching the Dharma. The Many Treasures Pagoda represents Buddha Many Treasures; in other words, it is the architectural expression of the theme of the two Buddhas seated together. At Mogao Cave 361, the Many Treasures Pagoda is of the stupa-form, with more curvilinear lines, and small subsidiary pagodas are painted beside it (Figure 7.4); it should also be a type of Vajra Throne Pagoda. Xiao Mo writes in *Research on Dunhuang Architecture*: "This Esoteric Buddhist style, though executed in brick and stone, is no less ornate and sumptuous than timber construction." Inside the central cella on the third story of the Flower Pagoda at Guanghui Temple

are displayed two Tang Dynasty stone seated Buddhas. *The Record of the Many Treasures Pagoda of Guanghui Temple in Zhenzhou* notes: "Within the pagoda there are stone images of the two Tathagatas, Many Treasures and Shakyamuni. An event is fully recorded in the 'Jeweled Stupa' chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*: as Shakyamuni preached the Dharma, a jeweled pagoda surged up from the earth." It is thus evident that these two images are of Many Treasures and Shakyamuni, and that the Flower Pagoda's alternate name, "Many Treasures Pagoda," also derives from this.

The Five-Pagoda ensemble in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region originated in the Northern Wei Dynasty, developed through the Liao, Jin, Yuan, and Ming dynasties, and by the Qing Dynasty had formed a complete system, spanning a millennium. The Northern Wei Four-Gate Pagoda at Che'erying Village in Beijing has small pyramidal towers at the four corners of the stone eaves and a large pyramidal tower at the exact center. As an early pagoda typology, Esoteric Buddhist (Mikkyō) elements lack direct textual attestation; the four-gate configuration may implicitly symbolize Mount Sumeru in Buddhism. In 2011, the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Hebei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics conducted a joint archaeological excavation at the Dazongchi Temple site in Yecheng, Linzhang, Hebei, and inferred that it dates to the late Northern Dynasties.[28] The temple's plan is nearly square; when reconstructed, it features a large central pagoda encircled by

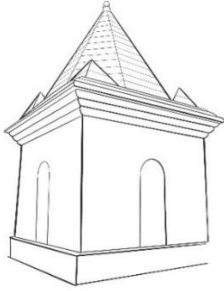
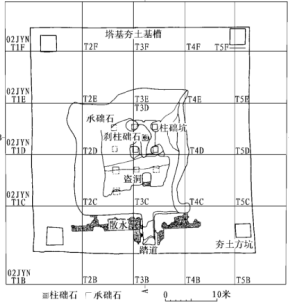
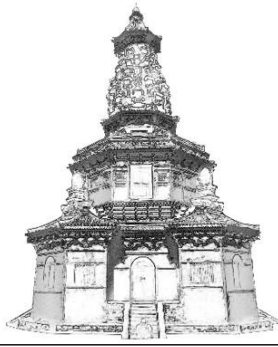
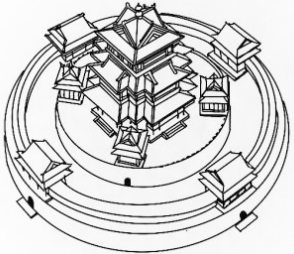
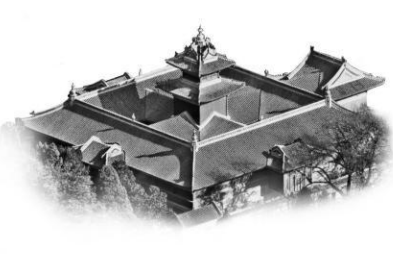
Five-Pagoda Ensemble			
	7.1 Che'erying Village, Beijing — Northern Wei Four-Gate Pagoda. Illustrated by Zhang Boxuan.	7.2 Plan of the pagoda foundation at the Northern Dynasties Buddhist temple site of Zhaopengcheng. Yecheng Archaeological Team. "Excavation of the Northern Dynasties Buddhist Temple at the Zhaopengcheng Site, Yecheng Ruins, Linzhang, Hebei." Kaogu (Archaeology), no. 7, 2010.	7.3 Liao Dynasty — North Pagoda of Yunju Temple. Image source: Dong Qingxin.
Many Treasures Pagoda			
	7.4 Mid-Tang — Esoteric Buddhist cave, Mogao Cave 361 (781 – 848). Image source: illustrated by Zhang Yu.	7.5 Tang – Northern Song — Flower Pagoda of Guanghui Temple. Image source: Dong Qingxin.	7.6 Korea — Esoteric Many Treasures Pagoda at Bulguksa, Silla period, AD 751. Image source: CNU.105 Studio.
Mandala			
	7.7 Qing Dynasty — model of the Pavilion of Rectifying the Mirror (completed in 1761). Image source: CNU.105 Studio.	7.8 Biyun Temple — Arhat Hall (Sino – Tibetan syncretism). Image source: CNU.105 Studio.	7.9 Biyun Temple — Vajra Pagoda, Qing Qianlong period. Image source: Toutiao account "Daguan Pindu."

Figure 7. Composite Pagodas

four smaller ones. The scholar Guo Jiqiao considers it an early Esoteric Buddhist “Vajra Throne Pagoda” type.[29] Built in the Tang Dynasty, Yunju Temple—one of the great northern temples—has long received little scholarly attention regarding its Esoteric Buddhist elements. Its North Pagoda was

rebuilt in the Liao Dynasty, with its foundation dating to the Tang Dynasty. The base is an octagonal brick Sumeru pedestal; the pagoda body is divided into two parts: the lower half is a two-story, pavilion-style hollow pagoda, and the upper half is a dome-shaped stupa body. This “Sino-Tibetan hybrid”

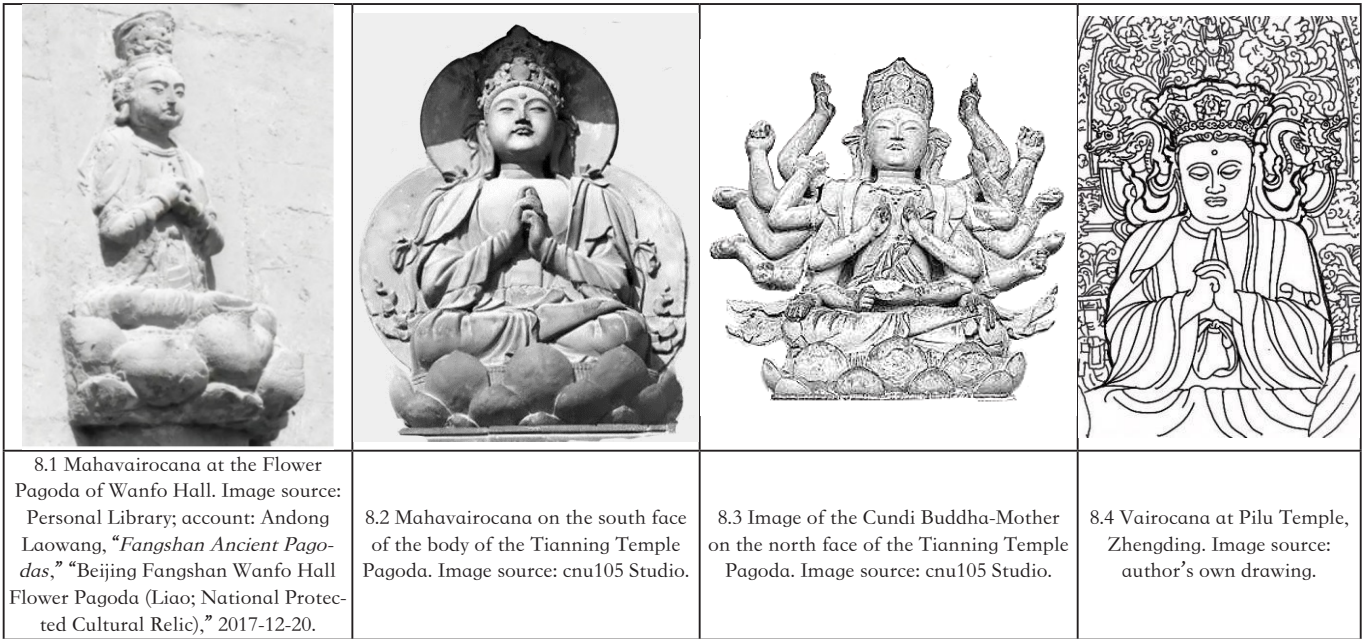


Figure 8. Mahavairocana Images in the Beijing – Tianjin – Hebei Region

configuration was common during the Liao period, when Esoteric Buddhism flourished; for example, the White Pagoda at Qingzhou in Inner Mongolia likewise fuses Exoteric Buddhist and Esoteric Buddhist styles. The hemispherical stupa (“lama pagoda”) is a hallmark element of Esoteric Buddhism, suggesting that the North Pagoda may have been influenced by Esoteric Buddhist ritual. At each of the four corners of the North Pagoda’s octagonal plan stands a small, dense-eaved Tang-style pagoda, echoing the octagonal-cruciform great-pagoda layout of Vajrayana architecture unearthed at Viharapur in Bengal, and reflecting a reconstructive awareness in Esoteric Buddhist architecture as it integrated Chinese traditions with Indian prototypes. The eight-bodhisattva reliefs and elaborate ornamentation of the Flower Pagoda at Guanghui Temple fully exemplify the characteristics of Esoteric Buddhist architecture.[30] During the Ming and Qing Dynasty, Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist architecture—such as Biyun Temple’s Arhat Hall, the Pavilion of Rectifying the Mirror, and the Vajra Throne Pagoda—had developed into highly mature mandala architecture (Figure 7).

3.3 Dense-eaved Pagoda - Central Great Pagoda

During the Liao Dynasty (AD 907–1125), Esoteric Buddhist architecture to some extent avoided the direct impact of the late Tang–Five Dynasties suppressions of Buddhism in the Central Plains. Pagoda construction inherited the formal norms and ritual prescriptions of the square, thirteen-story, dense-eaved pagoda within the Tang Esoteric Buddhist system, reflecting a deep integration between architectural typology and the belief system. Taking the North Pagoda at Chaoyang as an example: its extant Esoteric Buddhist features were formed chiefly during the 10th to 13th years of Chongxi under Emperor Xingzong of Liao Dynasty (AD 1041–1044),

through large-scale rebuilding and encasing renovation based on the Tang Dynasty Kaiyuan Temple pagoda. This marked a departure from the Tang convention of plain-bodied, platform-based dense-eaved pagodas, giving rise to a distinctive preference for elaborate carving. Upon a lofty base was set a richly ornamented Sumeru pedestal, and the figural decoration across the pagoda body became remarkably sumptuous—signaling a major transformation in dense-eaved pagoda podia from austerity to opulence. Situated at the temple’s center with monumental square dimensions, it is covered with Esoteric Buddhist reliefs. With the Five Buddhas of the Vajra Realm and the Eight Great Stupas as principal motifs, the Esoteric Buddhist implication is clear and explicit, making it a quintessential Vajra-Realm pagoda.[31] Scholar Yu Bo points out that the scripture pagoda excavated from the reliquary (“tiangong”) of the Chaoyang North Pagoda is engraved with an Eight Great Stupas mandala. By surveying Esoteric Buddhist texts such as *the Susiddhikara (Suxidi Jialuo) Sutra*, *the Mahāyāna Bensheng Xindi Guan Sutra*, and *the Sutra on the Names of the Eight Great Stupas*, he fully demonstrates that the Eight Great Stupas imagery carries profound Esoteric Buddhist mandala significance; accordingly, the Eight Great Stupas have become one of the most recognizable features for establishing the Esoteric Buddhist character of Liao pagodas. [32] Such square, dense-eaved great pagodas of the Liao period are mainly concentrated in the Chaoyang area (Figure 9.1). The pagoda body typically symbolically enshrines Vairocana, the fundamental Buddha of Esoteric Buddhism, or the pagoda itself (as with the Yunjie Temple Pagoda) serves as the embodiment, expressing the notion that the pagoda is the Buddha. Taking this as the core, Esoteric Buddhist images—such as the Five Buddhas of the Vajra Realm, the Eight Great Stupas, and related bodhisattvas—are systematically arranged on the four sides of the pagoda body and at specific locations,

9.1 Transmission			
	Chaoyang North Pagoda — Liao, 13th year of Chongxi (1044), hollow interior.	Chaoyang South Pagoda — Liao, 2nd year of Dakang (1067), hollow interior.	Chaoyang Great Treasure Pagoda — hollow interior.
9.2 Flourishing			
	Tayingzi Pagoda, Liaoning — Liao, 3rd year of Taiping to 1st year of Qingning (1023 – 1055), solid interior.	Chongxing Temple Twin Pagodas, Liaoning — Liao, Qingning – Tianqing period (1055 – 1123), solid interior.	Guangji Temple Pagoda, Liaoning — Liao, 3rd year of Qingning (1057), solid interior.
9.3 Disappearance			
	Nanan Temple Pagoda, Yu County — Liao, 1st year of Tianqing (111), solid interior.	Tianning Temple Pagoda — Liao, 9th to 10th years of Tianqing (1119 – 1120), solid interior.	Cishou Temple Pagoda — 4th year of Wanli (1576), solid interior.

Figure 9. Thirteen-Story Dense-Eaved Pagoda (Image source: CNU.105 Studio)

thereby constructing a 3D mandala, reflecting the transmission and development of Tang-Esoteric Buddhist faith in the Five Buddhas of the Five Directions. Professor Liu Zhiping, a scholar of historic architecture, states: “The Liao people mostly built brick dense-eaved pagodas; the lower portions of

the pagoda bodies often bear Esoteric Buddhist images.”[33] Undoubtedly, such square, large dense-eaved pagodas of the Liao period are Vajra-Realm pagodas that clearly embody the Esoteric Buddhist mandala conception, signaling that Tang Esoteric Buddhist architecture reached maturity in the Liao

and developed a distinctive style.

Beginning in the mid-Liao Dynasty, apart from the five square pagodas in Xingzhong Prefecture, virtually all Liao pagodas were octagonal, solid, dense-eaved types (with a very few hexagonal). The figural decoration on their bodies commonly featured the Eight Great Bodhisattvas and the Eight Great Stupas. The octagonal form was better suited to the placement of Buddha. The Tang-style square pagoda gradually gave way, transforming into the octagonal solid dense-eaved pagoda, which became the mainstream in pagoda construction. The predominance of the octagon was grounded chiefly in the mandala scene described in the fundamental scripture of the Esoteric Womb Realm, the *Great Sun Sutra*: “At that moment, in the Buddha-lands ... at the eight corners are erected jewel banners; the waters of the eight meritorious qualities are fragrant and brimming; innumerable birds—mandarin ducks, geese, and swans—emit harmonious, elegant sounds. ... In the eight directions, garlands of the five precious substances are linked together; the ground is soft like cotton; all who touch or tread upon it experience joy. ... The square altar has four gates, open and accessible to the west. Encircling boundary paths, within which appears the mind-born Great Eight-Petaled Lotus King. ... There, within the filaments, are: in the east, the Tathagata Jeweled Banner; in the south, the Tathagata Flower-Blossom King; in the north, the Tathagata Drum-Sound; in the west, the Tathagata Infinite Life; in the southeast, Bodhisattva Samantabhadra; in the northeast, Bodhisattva Guanyin; in the southwest, Manjushri the Youth; and in the northwest, Bodhisattva Maitreya.” This laid the foundation for the octagon to become the principal form of Liao dense-eaved pagodas.

Continuing the Tang form of the thirteen-story dense-eaved pagoda, it became the highest grade of imperially commissioned construction and was likely connected with the Esoteric Buddhist scriptures translated by Ci Xian. In those Esoteric Buddhist texts, the Great Mandala is described as follows: in the first court are the Five Buddhas and the four Pāramitā Bodhisattvas, with Mahavairocana at the center, four Buddhas in the four directions, and four bodhisattvas at the four corners; in the second court, the Eight Great Bodhisattvas; in the third court, the twelve offering bodhisattvas and the Ten Great Wisdom Kings. Offering powder-altar rite: At the center of the inner court stands a Buddha-relic stupa; in the east, a Tathagata; in the south, Vairocana; in the west, Amitayus; in the north, Akshobhya. At the four gates of the inner court, the Eight Great Bodhisattvas are arrayed in powder; in the second court, four goddesses each hold a treasure. The *Da Banruo Yin Qian Jing* records: “The Buddha told Ananda: erect a seven-treasures pagoda ... in all, thirteen stories.” In the *Huayan Sutra*, the number “thirteen” corresponds to the consummate stage of practice. In the twentyfold Huazang World, the thirteenth tier—where humans dwell—is the Saha world, taught by Shakyamuni. The thirteen tiers of eaves symbolize the level of the world inhabited by humans. Moreover, traditional

Chinese architecture esteems odd numbers of stories as signifying the supremacy of “Yang”. Thirteen, as the “utmost yang number,” accords with classical aesthetics. Therefore, the Liao thirteen-story dense-eaved brick pagoda should be regarded as a concrete, localized embodiment of the integrative Exoteric–Esoteric Buddhist ideal. It also signifies that Esoteric Buddhist dense-eaved pagodas reached their flourishing in the Liao Dynasty (Figure 9.2).

The Tianning Temple Pagoda adopts the typology of an octagonal, thirteen-story, dense-eaved brick pagoda and is a representative example of dense-eaved pagodas in the Youzhou area in the late Liao period. The entire pagoda is divided into four parts—base, body, eave tiers, and finial—consistent with the overall structural composition of early Liao pagodas, yet its details exhibit clear differences and pronounced regional characteristics. First, the foundation of the Tianning Temple Pagoda is broad and, compared with early Liao pagodas in the Chaoyang area, conspicuously lower. In the Chaoyang region, the dense-eaved pagodas have foundations of great vertical dimension, reflecting the Liao Dynasty’s aesthetic predilection for power and grandeur. At Tianning Temple, by contrast, the podium is reduced in scale, the forceful monumental beauty is diminished, and a momentum of dignified splendor is emphasized. In comparison with the Chaoyang dense-eaved pagodas, whose body-level Buddhist images are enormous, the Esoteric Buddhist images on the pagoda body of Tianning Temple—representative of this type—are smaller in scale (Figure 8), with appearing of narrative themes, and the carving is more luxuriant and refined. The brick-carved decorative treatment of the pagoda body exhibits greater refinement in technique, higher sculptural mastery, and a heightened sense of vitality in form. Esoteric Buddhist elements are more implicit, multicultural influences are more evident, and the relief decoration is richer, as seen, for example, on the Ming Dynasty Cishou Temple Pagoda (Figure 9.3).

3.4 Pagoda–Banner Symbolic System

Esoteric Buddhism regards the Dhāraṇī pillar, a product of combining a centrally symmetrical structure with inscriptions from the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra*, as a 3D manifestation of the mandala. It is a type of banner-pagoda that integrates scripture inscription and image-making and serves a religious function. Its rise, spread, and decline are closely tied to the emergence and development of Esoteric Buddhism.[34] In China, there are as many as 495 Dhāraṇī pillars with explicit documentary attestations. They are mostly distributed across North China, Central China, and East China, as well as in Shaanxi Province and parts of the eastern coastal provinces.[35] Since the Tang Dynasty, Dhāraṇī pillars have been distributed throughout the northern, central, and southern parts of the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region. The scale and splendour of these Dhāraṇī pillars are among the most outstanding in China. According to Sun Xingyan’s *Huanyu Fangbei Lu* (Table 3) in Qing Dynasty, a total of 88 Tang–Song Dhāraṇī pillars have been found

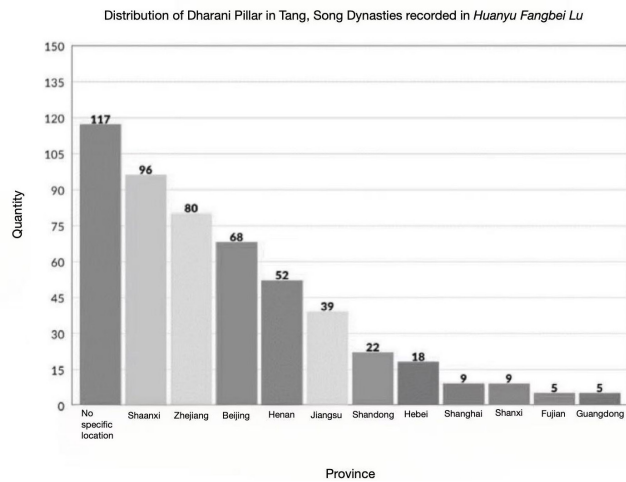


Table 3. Distribution Map of Tang – Song Dhāraṇī Pillars

in this region: 68 in Youzhou, 2 in Tianjin, and 18 in Hebei. [36] The profusion of such Dhāraṇī pillars, on the one hand, attests to the vigorous flourishing of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhism in this area. On the other hand, it provides material evidence for studying Esoteric Buddhist architectural typologies.

The earliest dated Uṣṇīṣa Vijaya Dhāraṇī pillar discovered to date is in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region—the “Buddha-Top Uṣṇīṣa Vijaya Dhāraṇī pillar” recorded at Benyuan Temple in Huolu, Hebei (702). The most canonical example is the Tang Dynasty Great Buddha-Top Uṣṇīṣa Vijaya Dhāraṇī pillar at Lulong, Hebei (Figure 10.2 & Image 2), which is more ornate than most pillars elsewhere: octagonal with six tiers, exquisitely carved, its exterior showing dragons coiling around jade-like columns, supported by eight auspicious

10.1 Sixteen-faced Dhāraṇī pillar at Kaiyuan Temple, Xingtai.	10.2 Great Buddha-Top Dhāraṇī Pillar at Lulong, Hebei.	10.3 Tianhu Dhāraṇī Pillar at Jingxing, Hebei.	10.4 Xiyijing Dhāraṇī Pillar, Handan City, Hebei Province.
During the Kaiyuan era of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang.	Yifeng era (676 – 679) under Emperor Gaozong of the Tang; rebuilt in the Jin.	Fifteenth year of Kaiyuan of the Tang (AD 727).	Northern Song
10.5 Zhaozhou Dharani Pillar.	10.6 Liao Dynasty Dharani Pillar at Gu'an, Hebei.	10.7 Dhāraṇī Pillar in Baodi District, Tianjin.	
Fifth year of Jingyou of the Northern Song (1038).	Late reign of Emperor Shengzong of the Liao (982 – 1031).	Liao, first to fifth years of the Kaitai era (1012 – 1016).	

Figure 10. Dhāraṇī Pillars in the Beijing – Tianjin – Hebei Region (illustration by Zhang Shiyu)

cious dragons. From the Kaiyuan era of the Tang Dynasty, the surviving portion of the Tianhu Dhāraṇī pillar stands 5 meters high; the main body is octagonal, the top has been damaged, and on the south face is inscribed, “Respectfully constructed the Buddha-Top Uṣṇīṣa Vijaya Dhāraṇī pillar for the nation” (Figure 10.3). Another Kaiyuan-era example is the Dhāraṇī pillar at Kaiyuan Temple in Xingtai, Hebei (built in 762; Figure 10.1), with extremely rare feature: 16 faces. Compared with those of the Tang Dynasty, Song Dynasty Dhāraṇī pillars are larger in scale. Examples include the Buddha-Top (Uṣṇīṣa) Dhāraṇī pillar built in Lincheng in the fifth year of Jiayou of the Northern Song (1060); the Dhāraṇī pillar for the relics of Master Qinggong in Baoding, Hebei; the Dhāraṇī pillar at Tianning Temple in Xingtai; and the Xiyijing Dhāraṇī pillar in Handan, Hebei (Figure 10.4). The most renowned is the Zhaozhou Dhāraṇī pillar from the fifth year of Jingyou of the Northern Song (1038), standing 16.44 meters high. It is the largest and tallest known extant Dhāraṇī pillar in China (Figure 10.5), marking the zenith of Dhāraṇī pillar construction. According to scholarly statistics, a total of 109 Dhāraṇī pillars are known to have been built during the Liao Dynasty.[37] Extant Liao Dynasty Dhāraṇī pillars number in the dozens, including the Haihui Temple pillar at Beizheng Village, Fangshan District, Beijing (5th year of Yingli under Emperor Muzong of Liao); the pillar at the base of the Liao-period Jingguang Śāriṣṭa Stupa in Shunyi District, Beijing; the Liao stone pillar at Shuanglin Temple in Zhaitangchuan Village, Mentougou; and the Dhāraṇī pillar in Baodi District, Tianjin (Figure 10.7). A more canonical example is the Liao Dynasty pillar at Gu’an, Hebei (Figure 10.6), made entirely of white marble (hanbaiyu) and approximately 7 meters high. The pillar body is octagonal and divided into four tiers; from bottom to top it is inscribed with the *Uṣṇīṣa Vijaya Dhāraṇī Sūtra* in raised regular script. It attains a high level of artistic accomplishment and reflects the ritual practice of Esoteric Buddhism in North China.

4 Characteristics of Han-Transmitted Esoteric Buddhist Architecture in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei Region

4.1 Integrative Nature

A salient hallmark of Esoteric Buddhism is its aptitude for absorbing local religious elements and remaking itself accordingly. In the course of its development, Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture continually absorbed and integrated elements of traditional Chinese culture, building techniques, and other religious cultures, thereby forming a distinctive style. For example, the Great Compassion Pavilion at Longxing Temple follows an “image-determined pavilion” schema: a mandala space designed to accommodate the Song Dynasty bronze statue of the Thousand-Armed, Thou-

sand-Eyed Guanyin. Its three stories correspond to the stages of cultivation associated with the Buddha’s Three Bodies (trikaya), and its five tiers of eaves symbolize the cosmology of the Five Buddhas of the Five Directions, making the building itself a walkable mandala-altar—an ethos of “the pavilion is the image, and the image is the pavilion.” Externally, the Guanyin Pavilion at Dule Temple appears as a two-story hip-and-gable-roofed structure, but internally it comprises three concealed levels, forming the distinctive configuration of “two externally, three internally.” This design implicitly accords with the Womb-Realm mandala’s symbolic system of a “three-tiered pavilion.” A multi-religious synthesis is also evident—for example, the murals in the Great Hall of Pulu Temple in Hebei present a distinctive cultural landscape of the integration of the Three Teachings: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. As a religious architectural form unique to Esoteric Buddhism, the Dharani pillar’s core function and symbolic significance were gradually absorbed and adapted by various schools of Han-transmitted Buddhism over the course of history, giving rise to a phenomenon of “generalization.” The four small hexagonal pagodas attached at the four corners of the main tower of the Flower Pagoda at Guanghui Temple constitute an early form of the Vajra Throne Pagoda, symbolizing the mandala layout of the “Five Buddhas of the Five Directions.” The 248 brick-carved lotus blossoms on the conical “bouquet tier” of the main tower’s fourth story echo the Exoteric Buddhist Huayan thought of the “Lotus contain World,” while the sculptures of eight lions and eight elephants create a visual unity of the “Vajra Realm” and the “Womb Realm.” The body of the bell at Beijing’s Fahai Temple is inscribed with Tibetan-script mantras, yet its knop bears Han-style dragon motifs, embodying the Ming Dynasty integration of Han and Tibetan Buddhist ritual, with practice still centered on the *Great Compassion Dharani* of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhism. The *Imperially Bestowed Stele Record of Fahai Chan Temple* within the temple explicitly records its construction principle of “adhering to Han norms while incorporating Esoteric Buddhist methods.” Localization is the result of the dissemination and cultural adaptation of Esoteric Buddhism. Characterized by mandala-form reconstruction and multi-religious integration, Esoteric Buddhism gradually became generalized and diffused—“Every sect has Esoteric Buddhism inside.” This process of generalization reflects the overarching trend in Chinese Buddhism toward the harmonious integration of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism.

4.2 Mystical Nature

Esoteric Buddhism created a complete symbolic and sign system to express its doctrinal ideas, which is difficult for non-initiates to comprehend. Sanskrit bīja are often carved on caisson ceilings or integrated into painted motifs, and the architecture itself frequently cultivates a mysterious ambience. For example, the caisson ceiling in the Mahavira Hall adopts a mandala-style structure based on the bīja of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhism. At the center is a depiction of Vai-

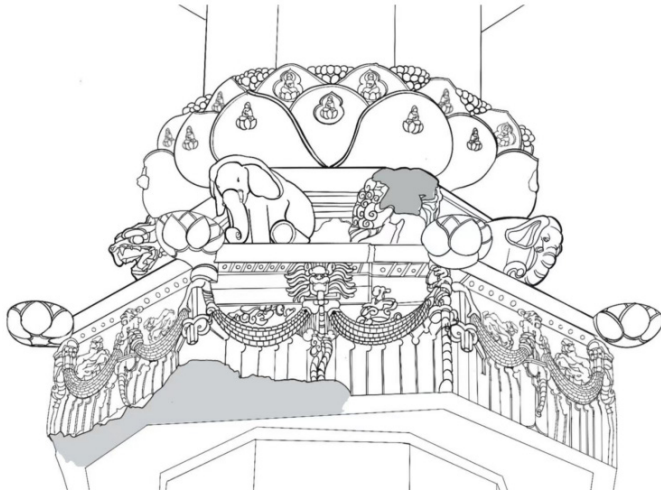


Image 2. Detail of the Tang-dynasty Great Buddha-Top Dhāraṇī Pillar at Lulong, Hebei (Image source: cnu105).

rocana, encircled by the eight classes of dharma protectors, embodying the Esoteric Buddhist cosmology of “one Buddha encompassing all.” Some halls within Esoteric Buddhist temple are arranged in a relatively concealed manner and may be entered only after specific rites and permissions, imparting an air of unfathomable mystery. The integration of painted Esoteric Buddhist murals with indigenous architectural forms embodies localized mysticism. The Sanskrit bīja painted on the beam framework of the Revolving Sutra Repository pavilion in the Great Compassion Pavilion at Longxing Temple together constitute a symbolic system of the “harmonious integration of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism.” Under the skylight illumination within the dim interior of the pavilion, this symbolic system creates an Esoteric Buddhist visualization experience of “the Buddha appearing in the light.” The Great Compassion Pavilion, together with the flanking Revolving Sutra Repository Pavilion and Maitreya Pavilion, forms a “one principal, two attendants” layout that implicitly accords with the Esoteric Buddhist mandala cosmological model of “a central Buddha stupa plus four directional guardians.” The octagonal, thirteen-eaved dense-eaved pagoda of Tianning Temple symbolizes the “eight-petaled lotus throne” in Esoteric Buddhism, corresponds to a mandala attended by the Eight Great Bodhisattvas, and represents the Esoteric Buddhist “Thirteen Heavens” sequence of practice. Through the axial layout of Chinese Buddhist Temple, the centrally symmetrical structure of Indian Esoteric Buddhism is transposed. Esoteric Buddhist architecture takes the mandala as its prototype; the symmetrical composition of towers and pavilions directly reflects the Esoteric Buddhist cosmology, with the center emphasizing the centrally symmetrical structure of the tower/pavilion, as at Dule Temple, Tianning Temple, and Wanshou Temple. Axial symmetry: taking the pagoda or Buddha Hall as the axis, subsidiary halls, bell and drum towers, etc. are arranged symmetrically on both sides, forming a pattern of “one principal, two attendants,” as in the Tianning

Temple Pagoda in Liao Dynasty, which exhibits centrally radiating symmetry. The eight-curve-beams caisson ceiling above the Guanyin statue composes a mandala pattern of the “eight-petaled lotus,” which, together with the Sixteen Arhats in the Ming Dynasty murals, forms a visual system of “dual cultivation of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism”.

5 Cultural Significance of Han-Transmitted Esoteric Buddhist Architecture in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei Region

5.1 Religious Significance

Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region constitutes important material evidence for the study of Chinese religious culture. They not only embody the religious characteristics of Esoteric Buddhism itself but also reveal a distinctive path of integration between Buddhism and traditional Chinese culture. The religious significance of these buildings is manifested both in their symbolic systems and their functions in spiritual practice and is likewise reflected in their multifaceted value as witnesses to history and as cultural bearers.

5.2 Artistic Value

Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture integrates the architectural techniques and artistic styles of China and India and possesses exceedingly high artistic value. Its distinctive architectural forms, exquisite decorative art, and rich cultural connotations provide precious primary material evidence for the study of ancient Chinese architecture, painting, sculpture, and other artistic forms. The proposal of this architectural type can link together the long-silent fragments of Esoteric Buddhist architecture in history to form a systematic typology of Esoteric Buddhist architectural forms and can also advance the interpretation of related numinous structures in other regions, such as Jinan’s Longhu Pagoda, the Jiuding Pagoda, the Yingxian Wooden Pagoda, and the Flower Pagoda at Dunhuang. Research, involving the survey and excavation of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region helps to protect and bring to light the region’s Buddhist architectural cultural heritage; Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture still holds very important historical status today, is imbued with rich cultural connotations, and may be regarded as a precious Buddhist cultural resource. Therefore, effectively utilizing the architectural remains of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhism can accurately reveal the national cultural spirit, cultural inclusiveness, and cultural confidence embodied therein, provide a diversified supply of cultural content, and strengthen the nation’s spiritual strength.

5.3 Significance of Cultural Exchange

The formation and development of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture stand as an important witness to cultural exchange between China and other lands. It not only absorbed the architectural elements and cultural connotations of Indian Esoteric Buddhism but also integrated with traditional Chinese culture to form a distinctive style. This cultural exchange has fostered mutual understanding and integration among different cultures, enriching the treasury of human civilization. The “Silk Road” is also known as the “Buddhist Road.” Ancient Buddhism spread eastward from Chang’an along the Silk Road, and the Esoteric Buddhist architecture that took shape in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region—with its rich and resplendent appearance—stands as historical testimony to the bonds of friendship between the Chinese people and the peoples of neighboring Buddhist countries. In advancing the Belt and Road Initiative, these precious architectural remains can play a positive role in promoting integration among different religions and cultures, fostering interaction among ethnic groups, and facilitating exchanges across regions. Therefore, research involving the survey and excavation of Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region is of great significance for enhancing the nation’s cultural soft power.

Conclusion

In sum, Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region can be broadly divided into four types: 1. Guanyin-category pavilion/hall type, such as the Guanyin Pavilion of Dule Temple from the Liao, the Great

Compassion Hall of Longxing Temple from the Song, and the Great Compassion Treasure Pavilion of Dahuisi in Beijing from the Ming; 2. Central octagonal thirteen-eaved pagoda type, such as the Tianning Temple Pagoda of the Liao and the Cishou Temple Pagoda of the Ming; 3. Treasure-pagoda type, such as the Flower Pagoda of Guanghui Temple and the Flower Pagoda of Wanfo Temple from the Tang–Song; 4. Dhāraṇī-pillar type. This paper demonstrates the correspondences between each architectural form and Esoteric Buddhist doctrine (e.g., mandala thought), as well as the characteristic integration of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism. It innovatively proposes a localization paradigm for Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture: an architectural language that fuses traditional ceremonial systems with Esoteric Buddhist liturgies. This study fills the gap in the systematic research on Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture and provides a typological basis for cultural-heritage conservation in the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region. Research limitations include the spatiotemporal unevenness of extant architectural samples, the absence of surviving Tang Dynasty architectural artifacts, and the subjectivity inherent in interpreting non-textual sources (e.g., decorative motifs). Future research may be extended to a comparative study of the Jiangnan belt of Esoteric Buddhist architecture, or further to the connections between Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture and the dissemination of Buddhism along the Silk Road, to refine the spatiotemporal trajectory of the development of Chinese Buddhist architecture. As an important testimony to the pluralistic unity of Chinese civilization, the Han-transmitted Esoteric Buddhist architecture of the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region urgently requires in-depth exploration of its historical value, artistic achievements, and cultural connotations.

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Ronald G. Knapp 那仲良 : A Pioneer in Introducing Chinese Traditional Vernacular Dwelling Culture to the World

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In the early stages of research and investigation into Chinese traditional vernacular dwellings, scholars conducted some sporadic surveys. Liu Dunzhen, in his 1941 publication 'Overview of Surveys on Ancient Architecture in Southwest China,' was the first to propose vernacular dwellings as an independent architectural type. In 1956, Liu Dunzhen published *An Introduction to Chinese Residences*. The earliest books on provincial vernacular dwellings in China were published between 1960 and 1962.

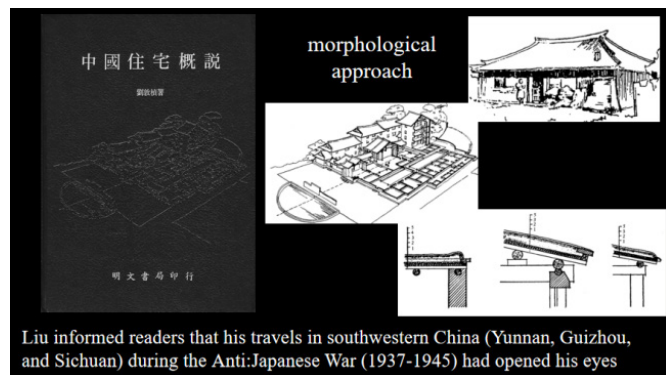


Figure 1. This is *An Outline of Chinese Residences*, a book by Liu Dunzhen, a professor in the Department of Architecture at Southeast University. Liu Dunzhen studied in Japan in his early years and received Western architectural education. Published in the 1950s, this book is one of the earliest works on traditional Chinese folk architecture.

Liang Sicheng, in his *History of Chinese Architecture* completed in 1944, categorized vernacular dwellings into four major types: those of North China and Northeast China, cave dwellings in Shanxi, Henan, and Northern Shaanxi, those of the Jiangnan region, and those of Yunnan.

The manuscript of *Zhejiang Vernacular Dwellings* was compiled in 1963 by the Research Office of Architectural Theory and History under the former Architectural Science Research Institute. This book was officially published in September 1984, making the survey results from the 1960s publicly available for the first time. Academic research on Chinese

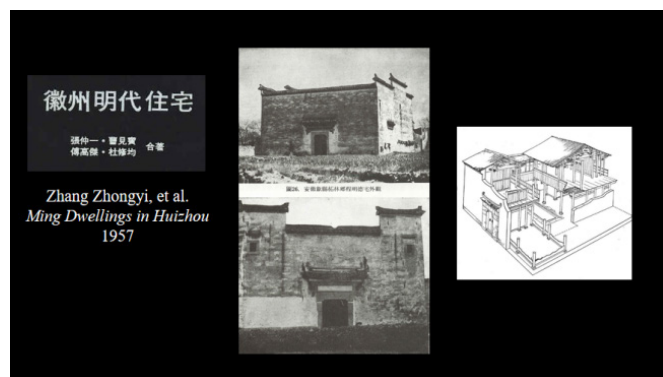


Figure 2. This is the book *Houses in Huizhou of the Ming Dynasty* published in 1957 by Zhang Zhongyi. Not many houses from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) have been preserved in China. This is one of the early works by scholars studying traditional Chinese dwellings.

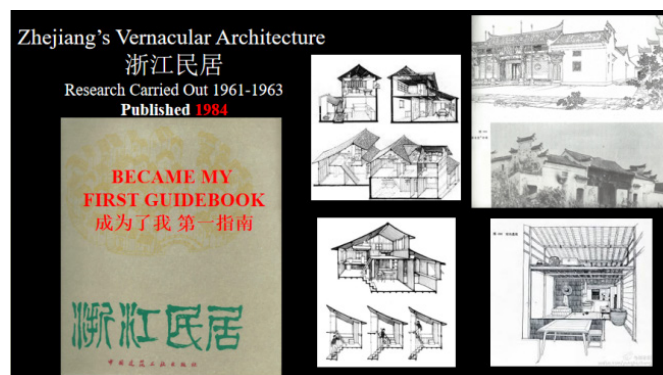


Figure 3. This is the first book published in China that provided a detailed introduction to local residences within a provincial scope. The authors are a group of people. It is the result of a survey conducted in the 1950s by a team from the China Academy of Building Research. The vast majority of the local residences mentioned in the book had already been demolished by the time the book was published until 1984.

traditional vernacular dwellings was interrupted during the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution; due to the political movement, surveys on vernacular dwellings were also forced to stop. After the Cultural Revolution, China's architectural community strived to break free from the influence of Soviet

classicism and sought to learn modernist architecture from the West, but struggled to understand the origins, techniques, materials, and design of modernist architecture.

After 1979, amid the tide of reform and opening up, China's architectural field experienced a significant ideological impact—the introduction of postmodernist architectural theory. The arrival of this theory was quite unique: at that time, Chinese scholars had not yet fully grasped the basic concepts of modernist architectural theory when the 'flight' of postmod-



Figure 4. An early program of the Communist Party and government was to plan the original small plots of land owned by dispersed households into compact grids with a modern grandeur. So that when the Martians come down, they will all be amazed.

ernist architectural theory quietly landed in China first, bringing new perspectives and directions to Chinese architectural research.

Postmodernist architectural theory has distinct characteristics. It breaks the limitations of modernist architecture, which one-sidedly pursues functionality while neglecting history, culture, and tradition. It highly values classical traditions, emphasizes that architecture should connect with historical context, focuses on drawing inspiration from traditional architec-



Figure 5. This is a house in a socialist new countryside under the people's commune system.



Figure 6. Traditional houses generally were not suitable for modern people's lifestyles. China also has had a severe shortage of wood. Therefore, farmers often demolished old houses and build new ones with bricks and concrete.

ture, incorporates classic architectural elements and symbols, and pursues diversity, complexity, and cultural connotations in architecture. This respect for classical traditions naturally aligns with China's profound historical and cultural heritage and rich traditional architectural legacy.

It was around this time in 1977 that an American scholar came to China and began his research on Chinese vernacular dwellings. This scholar was Ronald G. Knapp. His research on Chinese traditional vernacular dwellings predated that of most Chinese scholars and has continued to this day.

After earning his doctoral degree from the University of Pittsburgh in the United States in 1968, Knapp taught at the State University of New York at New Paltz from 1968 to 2001 in the Geography and Asian Studies Program. The reason why Ronald G. Knapp was able to take the lead over other scholars outside China is related to his special experiences afterward. In 1965, Knapp went to Taiwan to study Chinese and carry out field research, thus beginning his long-term research on

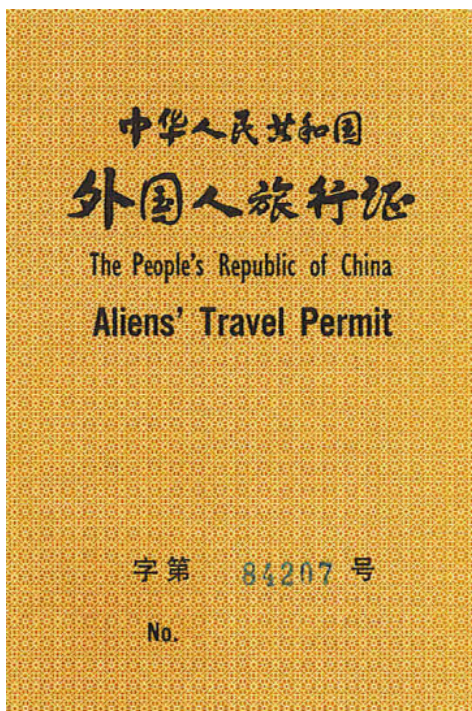


Figure 7. In the early 1970s, very few foreigners entered China. Even if they did, most areas were off-limits to foreigners. This was the permit Ronald G. Knapp obtained for traveling in China. However, this did not mean he could go anywhere he wanted. When staying in a hotel, he had to stay in one of the few designated hotels approved by the government to accommodate foreigners.



Figure 8. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Knapp was investigating residential buildings in Chinese rural areas, the hospitable Chinese farmers invited him for lunch. The host was pouring baijiu (a strong Chinese distilled liquor) for him. Chinese strong baijiu has an alcohol content as high as 65 degrees, and hosts often try every means to urge guests to drink until they get drunk. Otherwise, the host will feel that they have not received the guests well.

Chinese culture and historical geography. Ronald G. Knapp's Chinese teacher gave him a Chinese name, 那仲良, and soon became fluent in Chinese. This linguistic advantage in studying Chinese culture was unavailable to other foreign scholars at that time. During his study of Chinese, Knapp developed a strong interest in the extensive and profound Chinese culture. Geography is a discipline that requires fieldwork, but

due to the absence of diplomatic relations between mainland China and the United States at that time, he was unable to enter mainland China and could only learn about China from books. He yearned deeply for mainland China and once took a photo of himself looking across the sea at mainland China from the closest point on Taiwan Island to mainland China, as a testament to his feelings.



Figure 9. This is a photo of a residential house taken by Ronald G. Knapp in rural Shilin, Taipei City, Taiwan, China in 1965. This kind of house is the same as the traditional residential form in Quanzhou, mainland China. The influence of this immigrant culture was the incentive for Ronald G. Knapp to conduct investigations on residential houses in mainland China.



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In the 1980s, regional and provincial books on vernacular dwellings such as *Fujian Vernacular Dwellings* and *Yunnan Vernacular Dwellings* were published one after another. Additionally, after China's reform and opening up, many universities invited foreign scholars to give lectures. Knapp not only got the opportunity to conduct surveys on vernacular dwellings in China but also was invited to participate in a series of academic seminars on traditional vernacular dwellings held

by Chinese academic circles. It was around this time that I met Ronald at a conference on vernacular dwellings.

Ronald G. Knapp has an excellent entry point for his research on Chinese traditional vernacular dwellings, which is geography. Geography is a discipline that studies the Earth, its features, inhabitants, and phenomena. As a discipline, one of its branches is human geography, which focuses on researching how the environments and spaces built by humans are created, perceived, and managed by humans, as well as how humans influence the spaces they occupy. Unlike experts in architecture and architectural history and theory, scholars in geography, based on the research results of physical geography and human geography, pay more attention to the impact of the environment on architecture and human activities, the mutual relationship between humans and nature, and conduct research on the conditions for humans to conquer and transform nature to adapt to their own sustainable development. Even in today's Chinese academic circles, this aspect is still weak.



Figure 11. In 1949, the Communist Party made significant adjustments to Chinese society. It confiscated the large houses of the original landlords and distributed them to the poor for use. Since the houses, which were originally used by a single family, became used by many families, the vast majority of the houses allocated to the poor were renovated to accommodate more families.

Knapp believes that Chinese vernacular dwellings carry the ethical norms of China's 'ritual order.' For example, the northern courtyard house is a typical carrier of 'ritual system': with the central axis as the core, the main building where elders live faces south and is the largest in size; the side houses where juniors live are arranged on both sides and are slightly smaller in size; the reverse houses, used for servants' accommodation or as guest rooms, are located in the south of the courtyard house, forming a spatial order of 'distinction between superiority and inferiority, and clarity between elders and juniors'; the size of doors and windows, the number of



Figure 12. Knapp's investigation of traditional Chinese dwellings not only focuses on the buildings themselves but also pays more attention to the relationship between buildings, villages, streets, lanes, and people.



Figure 13. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), many characters on traditional door plaques were altered. The left picture shows 'First, fear no hardship; second, fear no death,' which was the standard Mao Zedong required ordinary people to meet. The right picture shows 'A Place of Liberation.'



Figure 14. Since China's reform and opening up in 1979, its economy has developed rapidly. All land in China is owned by the state and is not sold to individuals or enterprises. What is sold is only the right to use it for several decades, not the permanent property right. The government can demolish any house. The Chinese character in these two circles is 'chai' (demolish). That means this building is about to be demolished.



Figure 15. After the 1980s, when a large number of traditional dwellings were demolished and rebuilt, governments at all levels in China began to protect some excellent ancient dwellings when their financial conditions permitted.

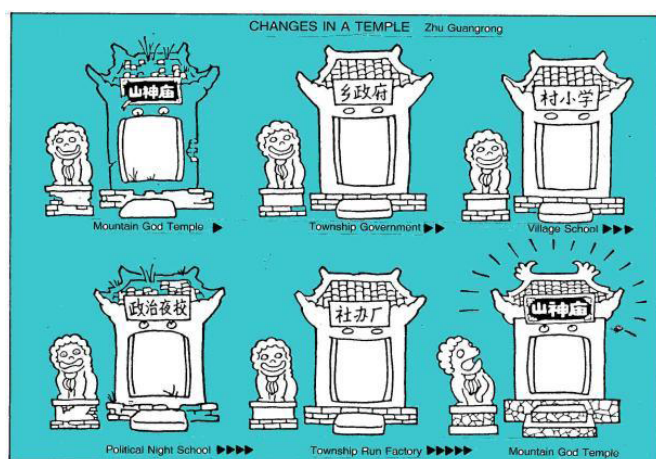


Figure 16. This cartoon depicts the different uses of the same building over several decades. This change can be seen from the plaque on the door. The change from a Mountain God Temple to serve the society at that time, and finally back to 'Mountain God Temple' was also to make money by selling tickets.

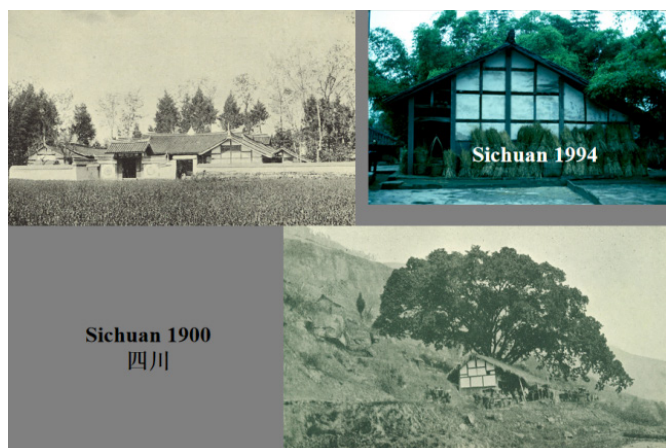


Figure 17. Two photos of residential houses in Sichuan Province, western China, taken by Ronald G. Knapp in 1994, and the picture below is a historical photo of Sichuan residential houses in 1900.

steps, and the decorations on the roof ridges all strictly follow social hierarchical norms, such as the prohibition of using dragon and phoenix patterns in ordinary vernacular dwellings. This transforms abstract ethical concepts into specific spatial structures.

In 1949, the Communist Party overthrew the cohesive function of traditional vernacular dwellings in maintaining the 'patriarchal clan' that had lasted for over a thousand years. The communist government distributed the houses of the wealthy to the poor. As a result, the current owners of the good houses were not the ones who built them, so they would not use the houses according to their original functional designs, thus damaging the original appearance of the houses. However, the concept of the 'patriarchal clan' remains strong among the people. This clan concept has always been reflected in Chinese vernacular dwellings. Knapp believes that the Fujian earth building strengthens clan cohesion through its circular communal living form: the center of the circular earth building is an ancestral hall, serving as a place for clan rituals and discussions. Hundreds of clan members live around it. The outer wall is as thick as 1-2 meters, with only a few arrow windows left, which not only defends against external enemies and wild beasts but also maintains the clan's blood ties through the living pattern of 'living in the same courtyard and worshipping in the same ancestral hall,' embodying the cultural core of the 'clan community.'



Figure 18. This village with five tulou (earthen buildings) are called Tianluokeng. Among them, two tulou were built during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The reason was the same as that for building tulou in ancient times. At that time, people thought society was unstable, so they built tulou for self-protection.

Knapp believes that Chinese vernacular dwellings hold significant meaning in customs because houses, courtyards, and villages are the spatial support and cultural witnesses of folk activities. Traditional vernacular dwellings are not only places of residence but also 'natural stages' for folk activities, with their spatial layouts and decorative details deeply integrat-



Figure 19. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, rural areas in China were generally quite poor. Knapp rented a car to go to the countryside to investigate local residences, which attracted the local villagers to come and watch.



Figure 20. The photos taken by Knapp record folk houses and the people's livelihood of that era from a unique visual perspective.

ed into folk scenes such as weddings, funerals, and festival rituals. Community spaces such as small squares in villages become the core venues for folk activities.

During festivals, the courtyards of northern courtyard houses would have colorful sheds built and banquets arranged. During the Spring Festival, couplets are pasted and lanterns are hung; during the Mid-Autumn Festival, people admire the moon; during the Double Ninth Festival, people climb heights. The size and layout of the courtyard space are just right for family reunions. The ancestral hall in Fujian earth building is the core scene of clan weddings—the bride must enter through the main gate of the earth building, walk along the central axis to the ancestral hall to pay respects to heaven and earth, and then enter the bridal chamber. The 'spatial route' of the entire process is itself an important part of the wedding customs. The 'sky street' of the Cantonese wok-ear houses, that is, the alley between two courtyard complexes, is a folk venue for hanging wormwood during the Dragon Boat



Figure 21. In the West, it is a very elegant billiards sport, but when it was introduced to China in the 1980s, it became an entertainment activity for people in rural or poor areas.

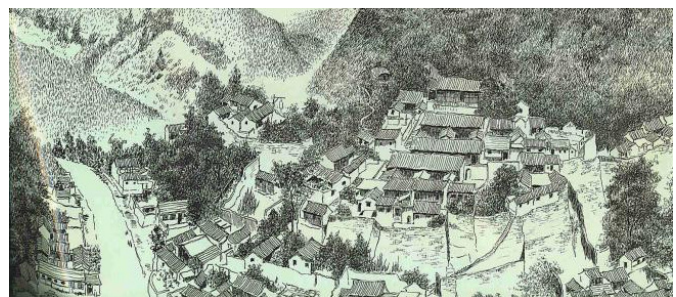


Figure 22. Beijing has an area of 16,400 square kilometers and is surrounded by mountains on three sides. This is Chuandixia Village in Mentougou District, a northwestern suburb of Beijing. It is a small mountain village. However, the layout of the village is random. The courtyards of each household are not on the same contour line, so the roads in the village are also winding and undulating, which is very ornamental.

Festival and setting up lantern markets during the Mid-Autumn Festival, carrying the collective memory of neighborhood celebrations.

Knapp's books also state that Chinese folk architecture re-



Figure 23. This is the roof of the houses surrounding a small courtyard in a traditional residential building in the southern Anhui region. The courtyard is very small, and all the rainwater from the roof flows into the courtyard. The folk legend implies that the 'fertilizer water' (symbolizing wealth) will not flow out, and wealth is kept within one's own home.



Figure 24. The character 'fu' (meaning good fortune or happiness) is the most widely used Chinese character in the decoration of Chinese dwellings.

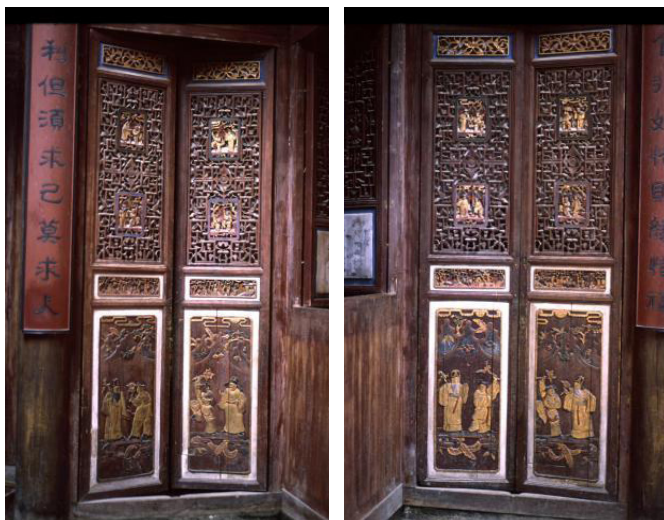


Figure 25. Many of the carved decorations in traditional dwellings depict scenes from ancient Chinese stories. This is not found in China's palaces, because the emperor did not allow anyone (even the figures in the carved decorations) to stand above his head.

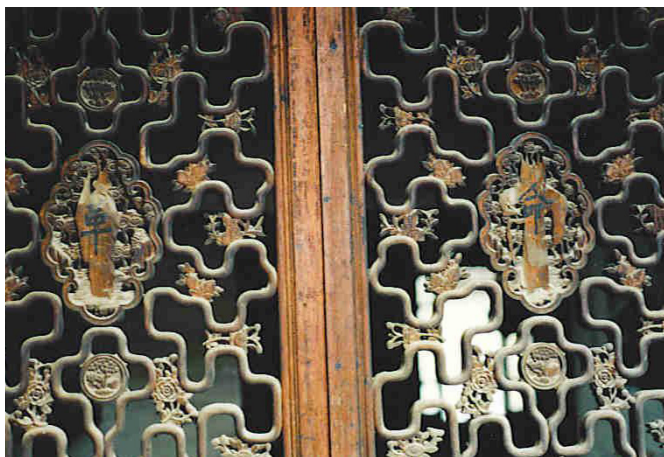


Figure 27. The patterns of the lattice are rich in variety, embodying people's expectations for a better life. Those depicted here were defaced during the Cultural Revolution.



Figure 26. Wood carving is one of the decorative techniques in traditional Chinese dwellings. It is often used for the lattice decoration of doors and windows. In the past, since there was no glass, people would paste window paper to let light through.

cords folk beliefs through decorative details. The decorations of vernacular dwellings are a ‘collection of folk symbols’: in the brick carvings and wood carvings of ancient vernacular dwellings in Huizhou area in central China, patterns such as ‘pine and crane for longevity,’ ‘kylin presenting a child,’ and ‘bumper harvest of the five grains’ express folk wishes for good fortune and auspiciousness; the paper-cuts on windows and the kang paintings depicting the twenty-four solar terms or folk stories in northern Shaanxi cave dwellings are ‘living fossils’ of folk art; the ‘swallow-tail ridges’ of southern Fujian vernacular dwellings, that is, the two ends of the house ridge stick up like the tails of swallows, not only symbolize the good wish of ‘spreading wings and flying high’ but also echo the local folk belief of ‘respecting heaven and worshipping ancestors.’

Knapp summarized Chinese vernacular dwellings, saying that they are the core carriers and regional symbols of local wisdom. Traditional vernacular dwellings are the ‘main body’ of the local architectural system, embodying the unique building materials, techniques, and wisdom of a region, and are important symbols for distinguishing different local cultures. Chinese vernacular dwellings also carry the wisdom of materials and techniques in local architecture. When building vernacular dwellings, local resources are fully utilized, forming unique local techniques: the Loess Plateau uses ‘rammed earth walls’ to build cave dwellings; Fujian uses ‘raw earth + bamboo and wood’ to build earth building; southern Anhui uses ‘blue bricks and black tiles + horse-head walls’ to build ancient vernacular dwellings; Lingnan in south of China uses ‘blue bricks + horizontal bar gates’ to build wok-ear houses. These material choices, such as loess, bamboo and wood, and blue bricks, all come from local natural endowments, and techniques such as ramming earth, mortise and tenon, and brick carving are local wisdom passed down from generation to generation, without relying on foreign technologies, reflecting the local architectural logic of ‘using local materials and adapting to local conditions.’

Knapp used his geographical knowledge to support the integrity of China’s local architectural system. His many books reveal that local architecture includes vernacular dwellings, ancestral halls, opera stages, temples, etc., among which vernacular dwellings are the ‘foundation and core’: ancestral halls and opera stages are mostly arranged around vernacular dwellings. For example, the center of a earth building has an ancestral hall, and an opera stage is set near a courtyard house, serving the living and spiritual needs of residents. Construction techniques of vernacular dwellings, such as rammed earth and wood carving, also extend to other local buildings, forming a unified local architectural style and maintaining the integrity and continuity of the local architectural system.

Ronald G. Knapp approaches from a macroscopic perspective beyond the architectural entity, and his research vision has been broader than that of scholars engaged in architectural

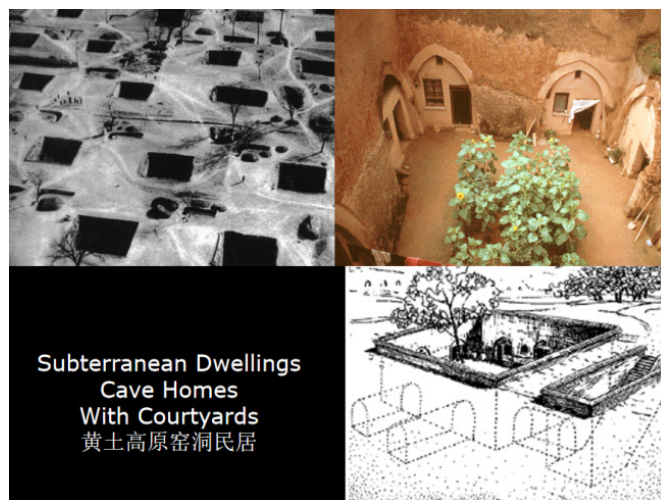


Figure 28. In the flat Loess Plateau region in western China, due to a lack of wood and the arid, rain-scarce climate, people first excavated a sunken small square downward to serve as a courtyard. Then they dug cave dwellings around it to use as residences. Among them, there is a slope-type tunnel that serves as the entrance and exit for the family.



Figure 29. This is a residential house in Cangnan County, Zhejiang Province. The walls are made of wood. The two ends of the roof ridge are upturned, forming an elegant roof shape.

history and theory. Therefore, Ronald G. Knapp’s investigations into Chinese vernacular dwellings are highly academic, professional, and in-depth studies. His research on Chinese folk residences in the field of geography has been rarely involved in by other scholars, and his research on vernacular dwellings has unique professional perspectives from human geography, with irreplaceable academic value. In terms of presenting research results, he began to publish books on Chinese folk architecture from the 1980s, and they were written in English, which is accessible to most people. Therefore, Ronald G. Knapp has disseminated his research results on Chinese traditional vernacular dwellings worldwide and is one of the earliest scholars to study Chinese vernacular dwellings.

China’s Traditional Rural Architecture: A Cultural Geography



Figure 30. A memorial archway is a commemorative community gate used to honor those who have served as high-ranking officials, widows who remained chaste, or others who have performed certain meritorious deeds. Some villages even have many archways along their roads. They also serve to demonstrate that their village has produced many people worthy of praise.

of the *Common House*, published in 1986, was Ronald G. Knapp's first English work introducing Chinese local architecture to the Western world. In the nearly fifty years since then, as his research has continued to deepen, he has published more books on Chinese architecture, including: *China's Living Houses: Folk Beliefs, Symbols, and Household Ornamentation* (1999); *China's Old Dwellings* (2000); *Chinese Houses: The Architectural Heritage of a Nation* (2005); and *House Home Family: Living and Being Chinese* (ed. with Kai-Yin Lo)(2005).



Figure 31. This is the exterior of the building in the last courtyard of Baolun Pavilion (an ancestral hall of a family). It is now a national cultural relics protection unit in China.



Figure 32. Knapp focused on collecting different road landscapes, different gates, and labor tools of the time in his survey.

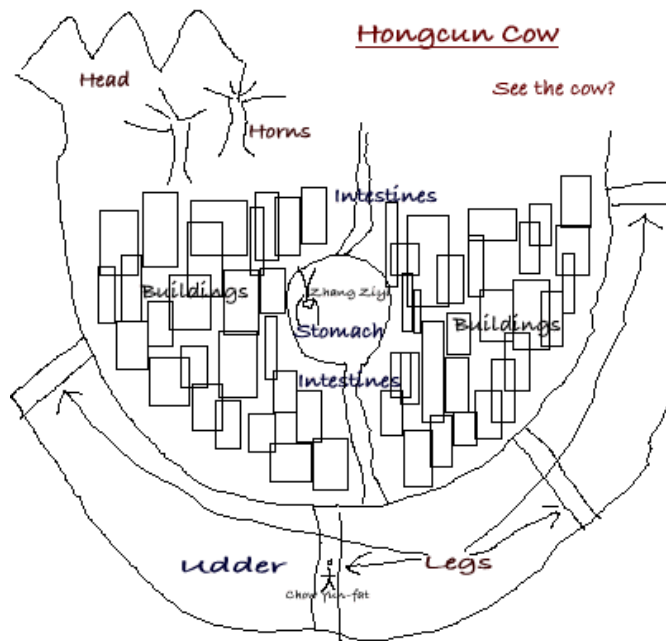


Figure 33. This land plan shows that the layout of Hongcun (located in Yixian County, Anhui Province) is like an ox' body.

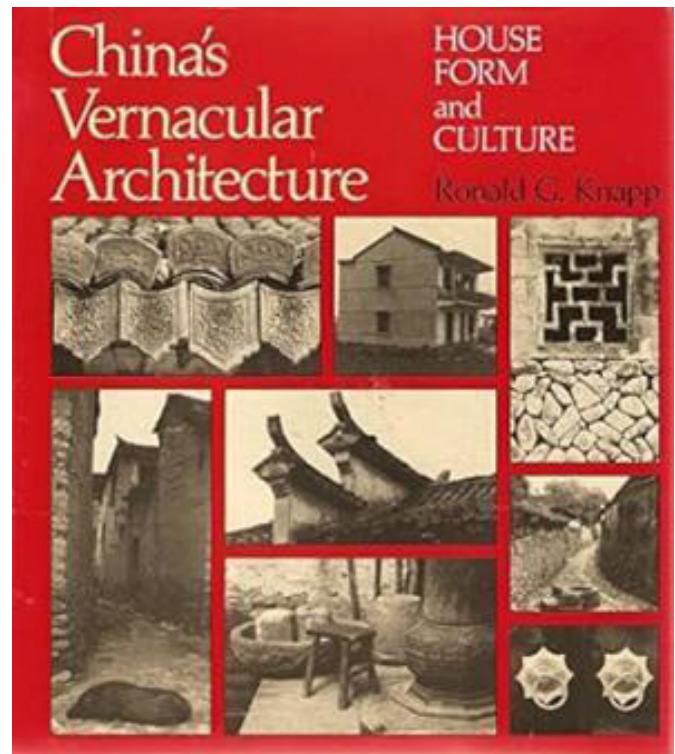


Figure 35. *China's Vernacular Architecture: House Form and Culture*, published in 1989 by University of Hawaii Press focused on a single province, Zhejiang.

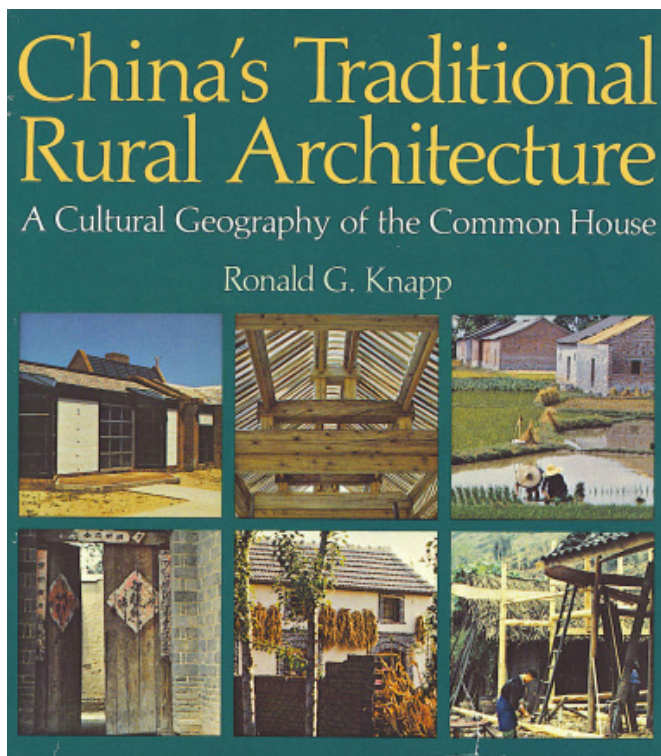


Figure 34. Titled *China's Traditional Rural Architecture: A Cultural Geography of the Common House* published by Ronald G. Knapp in 1986. This was the first book in English on the subject.

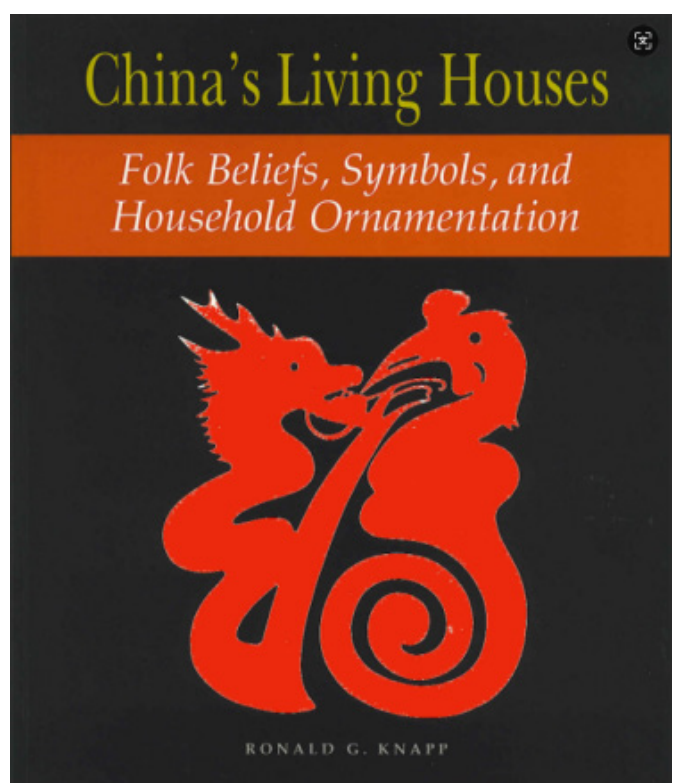


Figure 36. This is *China's Living Houses-Folk Beliefs, Symbols, and Household Ornamentation* published by Ronald G. Knapp in 1999.

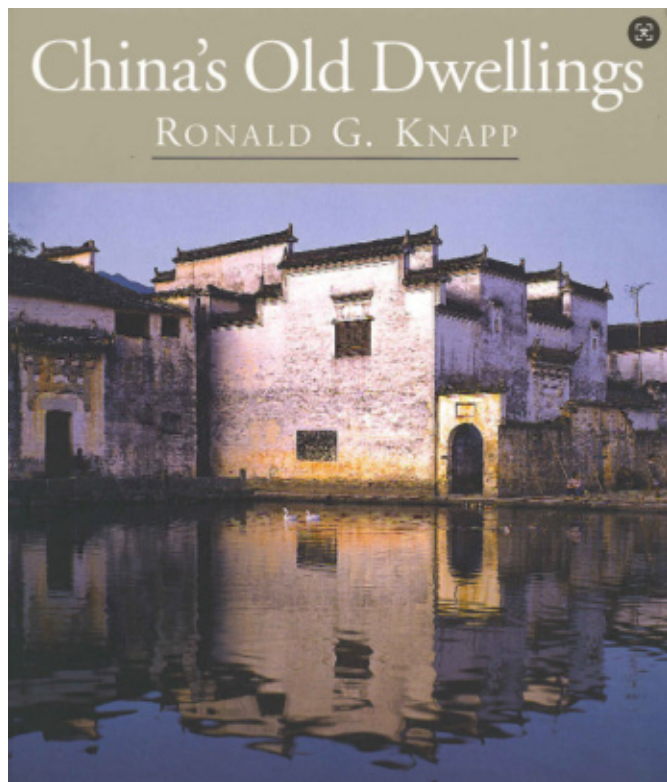


Figure 37. This is *China's Old Dwellings* published by Ronald G. Knapp in 2000.

Two of Knapp's books have been translated into Chinese. A two-volume translation of *House Home Family: Living & Being Chinese* appeared in 2011 as *家 -- 中國人的居家文化* SDX Joint Publishing Company, a well-known Chinese publishing house, published the Chinese version of *Chinese Houses: The Architectural Heritage of a Nation* as *图说中国民居* in 2018. In the same year, the prestigious School of Architecture at Tsinghua University held an international seminar specifically for his academic research.

As a geography professor, one extremely important feature

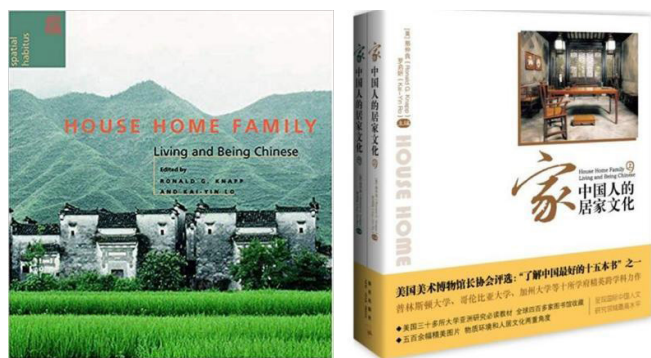


Figure 38. Based on a symposium organized by China Institute in New York City, the book *House Home Family: Living & Being Chinese* was published in 2004 by Ronald G. Knapp in collaboration with Kai-yin Lo with contributions by leading scholars from all over the world. A Chinese translation titled *家 -- 中國人的居家文化* was published in 2011.

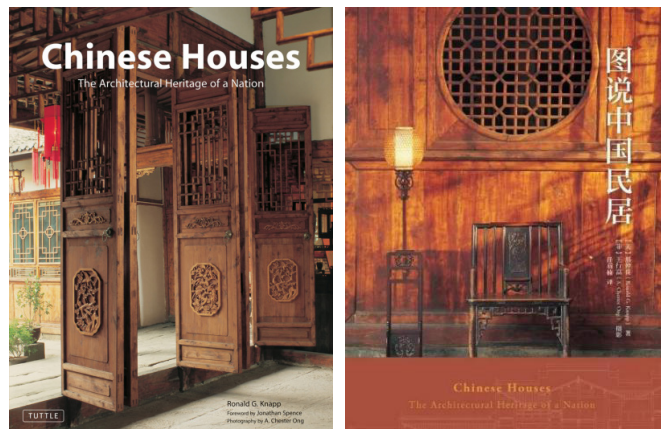


Figure 39. *Chinese Houses: The Architectural Heritage of a Nation*, published in 2005 was translated and published in two volumes in China in 2018 as *图说中国民居*

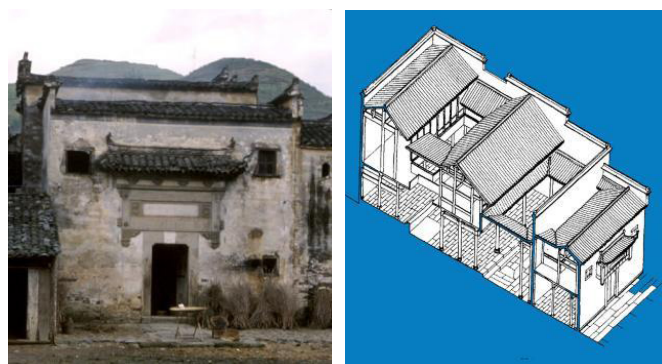


Figure 40. This is a photo of the front elevation and a sectional projection view of a traditional folk house in southern Anhui.

of Ronald G. Knapp's monographs is that they start from the perspective of ordinary readers, especially those who have little or no understanding of Chinese history and culture, beginning with the basic knowledge of Chinese vernacular dwellings. He combines Chinese culture with traditional vernacular dwellings and introduces them to the world in English, enabling more readers and scholars around the world to understand Chinese traditional vernacular architecture and the excellent Chinese culture. Although a few Chinese scholars have written books in English introducing ancient Chinese architecture and published them abroad, the influence of their works is completely incomparable to that of books written by an American professor, a native English speaker, and published by American publishing companies in Western society.

In Ronald G. Knapp's books, extensive materials and numerous vivid and interesting illustrations are used to supplement and explain his viewpoints. These materials and illustrations include not only high-quality photos specially taken by Filipino photographer A. Chester Ong but also many interesting and rare historical photos. The photos not only show buildings but also living scenes in vernacular dwellings, as well as scenes of processing and producing vernacular dwelling

building materials and constructing vernacular dwellings. There are also floor plans, elevations, sections, cutaway perspectives of buildings, as well as architectural diagrams from local chronicles or genealogy. There are illustrations selected from ancient books such as *Tiangong Kaiwu* (The Exploitation of the Works of Nature) and *The Twenty-Four Filial Piety Stories with Retribution Illustrations*, as well as folk prints, folk New Year paintings, folk paper-cuts, and even images of some amulets. There are also architectural images on ancient brick carvings and ancient architectural images in ancient paintings. Many of these images come from collections outside China, such as the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, so they are quite novel to Chinese readers. Ronald G. Knapp has conducted down-to-earth investigations in mainland China, and also carried out field research in rural areas in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia to study folk residences. As a geographer, these personal investigations have provided him with a large amount of first-hand fieldwork data, which has played a key role in his accurate classification and description of Chinese vernacular dwellings. With economic development and the deepening of modernization, rural areas in China have carried out large-scale demolition, renovation, and new construction of traditional vernacular dwellings from the 1990s to the present, causing the vernacular dwellings to gradually lose their original appearance. The early collected photographs in Ronald G. Knapp's books have thus become precious materials for readers to understand the original style of Chinese vernacular dwellings.

The reason why Chinese vernacular dwellings can become a discipline is that they are architecture without architects. The designers and builders of Chinese vernacular dwellings are the owners of the dwellings. Therefore, the order arrangement, cultural connotations, organizational efficiency, historical changes, etc., of Chinese vernacular dwellings as the basic spatial units of traditional society have become an intangible cultural heritage beyond the physical entities of Chinese vernacular architecture. For Chinese readers who have grown up in the local cultural environment but have never investigated or visited typical traditional vernacular dwellings and have never explored the traditional architectural culture that they think they are familiar with, such a book will arouse their interest in Chinese traditional culture. On the basis of realizing how little they know about traditional architecture, it will further inspire them to visit those ancient vernacular dwellings scattered in various places during their travels, and then generate a sense of mission to embrace and inherit their own maternal culture through reflection.

Ronald G. Knapp has persisted in his research for decades without being influenced by others while introducing the writings of Chinese scholars to Western readers. He has a broad vision and rich field investigation experience, and holds a large amount of first-hand survey data. He has benefited from both Chinese and English reference materials. More-

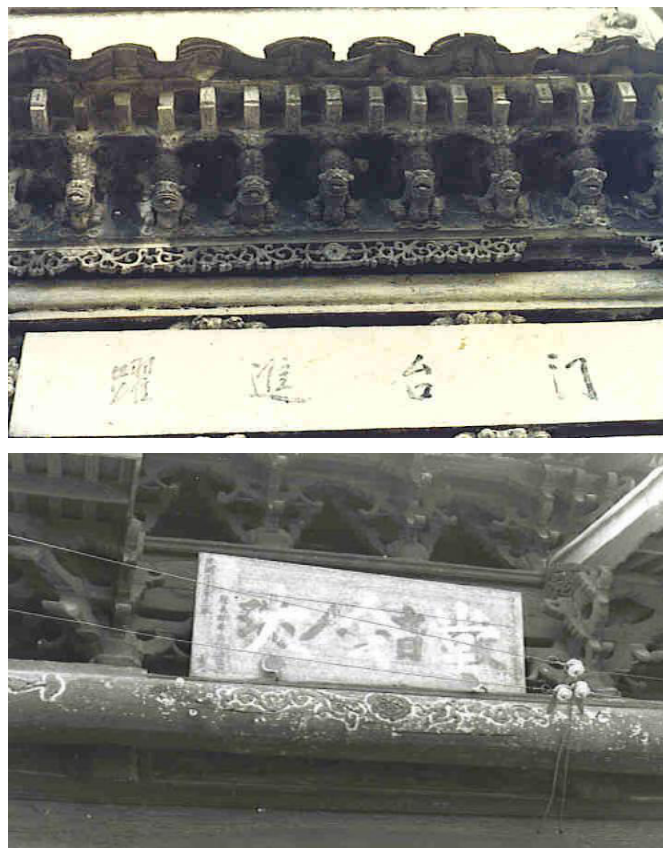


Figure 41. There are door plaques on the doors of traditional dwellings, which express one's ideals or highlight the family's status. Those here were plastered over with revolutionary slogans during the Cultural Revolution.



Figure 42. When the local government saw that traditional residences were constantly being demolished by their owners to be rebuilt into modern ones, it began to protect a small number of better-preserved traditional courtyard residences. This is the reconstructed exterior of Yin Yu Tang in the United States.

over, he has benefited from close collaboration with Chinese architectural historians, and geographers over his six decades studying rural China. Therefore, his research perspective on Chinese vernacular dwellings has always been distinct from the strengths of domestic scholars researching vernacular dwellings, each having different scopes and characteristics. Over the past decade, he has carried out research on Chinese bridges—another form of vernacular architecture—especially the extraordinary langqiao ‘corridor bridges.’ His two books about langqiao have introduced to Western readers using the common English term ‘covered bridges.’ Ronald G. Knapp established his academic goals early on and adhered to them for a long time without wavering, ultimately achieving his special academic status in the field of Chinese traditional vernacular dwellings.



Figure 43. This is a traditional residential building in Meixian County, Guangdong Province, in southeastern China, called Weilongwu (circular dragon house). From a plan view, the house has a semicircular layout, with one circle enclosing another. In front of the house, there is a small square, and further ahead, there is a semicircular pool. The overall layout is like the plan of a stadium track. When Ronald Knapp was conducting his investigation, the local villagers followed him curiously to watch.



Figure 44. Ronald G. Knapp’s investigation into Chinese vernacular dwellings covers a very wide range. The above is a ticket for the Wang Family Grand Courtyard in Lingshi County, Shaanxi Province, northern China. The following is a ticket for Luzhi Village, Wujiang District, Suzhou, Jiangsu Province (near Shanghai on the south bank of the Yangtze River).

All photos in this article are provided by Ronald G. Knapp



Recent photos of Ronald G. Knapp

Appendix :

Ronald G. Knapp’s Books

China’s Traditional Rural Architecture: A Cultural Geography of the Common House

Publisher: University of Hawai’i Press

Publication Year: 1986

A pioneering English-language study of China’s vernacular architecture, surveying the forms, materials, and cultural geography of rural common houses across regions. Knapp documents spatial organization, building techniques, and the social meanings embedded in dwellings, bringing decades of fieldwork to a comprehensive, scholarly account.

China's Living Houses: Folk Beliefs, Symbols, and Household Ornamentation

Publisher: University of Hawai'i Press

Publication Year: 1999

Explores how folk beliefs and auspicious symbolism shape the design and decoration of Chinese homes. The book connects everyday domestic ornamentation to ritual practice and cosmology, revealing how visual symbols structured daily life within the household.

China's Old Dwellings

Publisher: University of Hawai'i Press

Publication Year: 2000

A richly illustrated, in depth synthesis of Chinese domestic architecture, covering spatial components, construction methods, regional types, and preservation challenges. Knapp situates traditional housing within the social and economic changes that threaten these environments.

Chinese Houses: The Architectural Heritage of a Nation

Publisher: Tuttle Publishing

Publication Year: 2005

Presents twenty exemplary traditional houses from urban and rural China with extensive photography and historical context. Profiles highlight architectural features, craftsmanship, and cultural significance, offering an accessible overview of the nation's domestic heritage.

House Home Family: Living and Being Chinese (ed. with Kai Yin Lo)

Publisher: University of Hawai'i Press; China Institute in America

Publication Year: 2005

An edited volume examining how Chinese families organize domestic space and how the concepts of house and family (家) shape each other. Essays analyze regional diversity, symbolism, and social practices that structure everyday life within Chinese homes.

Chinese Bridges: Living Architecture from China's Past

Publisher: Tuttle Publishing

Publication Year: 2008

A comprehensive, photographically rich survey of China's historic bridges—stone, timber, arch, and covered—presented as living architecture. Includes detailed case studies and essays on distinctive design elements and the cultural landscapes surrounding them.

China's Covered Bridges: Architecture Over Water

Publisher: University of Hawai'i Press (distributed); ISBN 9781952461026

Publication Year: 2020

The first comprehensive English-language treatment of China's covered bridge traditions—documenting timber corridor bridges and other types with over 600 images, based on decades of observation and ten years of field research by Knapp, Terry E. Miller, and Liu Jie.

About the author of the article:

Wang Qijun

Professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, China

Graduated from the School of Architecture, Tsinghua University in 1996 with a doctoral degree

Expert on Chinese vernacular dwellings and artist

Has published a large number of books introducing ancient Chinese architecture, which have been translated into more than ten languages and published.



A VIEW OF THE ALLEY, 178CM x 180CM, 2024

Oil on Canvas by Qijun Wang



DAI PEOPLE'S FESTIVAL GATEHRING, 200CM × 240CM, 2020

Paper-based colored ink by Jiang Li



GROUP PAINTING OF TIBETAN, 138CM x 38CM x 4CM, 2020

Paper-based colored ink by Jiang Li

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