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A RAY OF SUNSET IN THE CITY, 150X148.5CM, CREATED IN 2014

Watercolor painting by Qijun Wang

BELIEF, 75X55CM

Watercolor painting by Qijun Wang

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Research Articles



002

Magic Visions – Blood as the Ink of Existence in Frida Kahlo' s Paintings and Beyond

Xiao Huang

DOI: 10.69954/SOA020201



011

Re-envisioning the Aura — The Manifestation and Application of Mythological Value Forms in the Cultural and Creative Industries

Jun Wang

DOI: 10.69954/SOA020202



051

Chinese lacquerware — The perfect combination of luxury and cost

Qijun Wang

DOI: 10.69954/SOA020203



065

Wall, Public Sphere and Chinese Architecture

——Starting from Shenzhen Dafen Art Museum

Delin Lai

DOI: 10.69954/SOA020204



Research Articles



073

Art as Resistance and Reconciliation:
Muslim Women' s Contemporary Art in Thailand' s Deep South

Xiao Huang

DOI: 10.69954/SOA020205

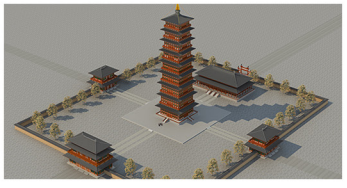


080

From Trash to Fashion: Understanding Wearable Art as Environ-mental Activism

Xiao Huang

DOI: 10.69954/SOA020206



087

Re－exploration of the Possible Original Appearance of the Yongning Temple Pagoda in Luoyang during the Northern Wei Dynasty

Guixiang Wang

DOI: 10.69954/SOA020207



Research Articles

Magic Visions – Blood as the Ink of Existence in Frida Kahlo's Paintings and Beyond

Xiao Huang
DOI: 10.69954/SOA020201

Abstract: This essay explores the profound symbolism of blood in art, focusing on Frida Kahlo's works and their influence on avant-garde artists. Blood, as a visceral and symbolic medium, serves as a powerful metaphor for pain, resilience, and existential inquiry. Kahlo's paintings, such as The Suicide of Dorothy Hale (1938) and Tree of Hope, Remain Strong (1946), utilize blood to articulate physical suffering, emotional turmoil, and defiance against fate. In The Suicide of Dorothy Hale, Kahlo controversially employs the traditional Christian "ex-voto" or "retablo" form to depict a suicide, blending sacred and secular narratives, while challenging religious orthodoxy. Tree of Hope, Remain Strong juxtaposes her physical agony with a resolute spirit, symbolizing the duality of human vulnerability and strength. The essay further examines how blood as an artistic medium transcends Kahlo, influencing artists like Yves Klein, Michel Journiac, Gina Pane, and Vincent Castiglia. Klein's Le peintre de l'espace se jette dans le vide (1960) uses bodily risk to explore immateriality, while Journiac's Messe pour un corps (1969) and Pane's Le corps pressenti (1975) transform blood into a ritualistic and subversive force, interrogating identity and societal norms. Castiglia's use of his own blood as paint underscores the intimate connection between life and art. Collectively, these artists expand the symbolism of blood beyond personal suffering, exploring themes of mortality, transcendence, and the corporeal. Their works, though distinct, form a cohesive narrative that redefines blood as a medium for profound artistic and existential expression, challenging traditional boundaries and enriching the discourse on art and human experience.

Key words: blood in art; visceral symbolism; existential suffering; artistic transcendence; corporeal rituals; metaphysical exploration

1. Preface

Blood, perhaps, is the most direct response to "the ultimate nature and true essence of all phenomena" (a Chinese Buddhist terminology, the Chinese pronunciation is: Zhū fǎ shí xiāng)—an unequivocal and incisive depiction of sensory perception. Blood is both a reality and a sharp, vivid symbol. When blood flows from the body, it becomes the most palpable, visceral sensation. After Van Gogh cut off his ear, he created several self-portraits, among which one titled Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe (1889) features a background split between orange-red and blood-red. In the thick, sweeping strokes of paint, one can almost feel the blood spurting from an ear as it falls to the dirt.

In leafing through Frida Kahlo's diaries and paintings, "blood" seems to possess a supernatural, magnetic allure, like a force capable of ensnaring the soul, rendering her entranced and consumed. When she wrote of her passionate love for Diego Rivera, the imagery of "blood" flows relentlessly from her pen: "My fingertips touch your blood. All my joy comes from feeling the fountain of your blooming life surge forth, filling every one of my veins." [1] Perhaps her fingers graze Diego's body, or perhaps nothing at all -- "touching blood" is an imaginative extension of a desire so sharp, so visceral, it is as though the eyes themselves reach deep into the very core of the flesh, igniting passion within a delirious reverie. The phrase "my fingertips touch your blood" is unfathomable, fervent, and electrifying, yet also profoundly terrifying, for blood can only be touched by slicing through the flesh, and the act of bleeding is the closest one can come to death. The love that haunts Frida's every waking thought, that holds her captive, is but a hair's breadth away from pain, sorrow, and the inexorable pull of death.



Image 1. Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe (1889), by Vincent van Gogh

Website Resource: https://www.vincentvangogh.org/self-portrait-with-bandaged-ear-and-pipe.jsp



Image 2. The Suicide of Dorothy Hale (1938), by Frida Kahlo

Website Resource: https://www.fridakahlo.org/the-suicide-of-dorothy-hale.jsp

2. The Suicide of Dorothy Hale (1938):

Blood, Sacred Abyss and Struggle for Redemption

2.1 A Chiaroscuro of Chaos and Eternity:

Frida Kahlo's Blood-Stained Haunting Ode to Loss

On the fateful day of October 21, 1938, the luminous life of Dorothy Hale, a cherished confidante of Frida Kahlo, was extinguished in a harrowing plunge from a towering edifice. Clare Boothe Luce, the formidable publisher of Vanity Fair and a mutual acquaintance of both Frida and Dorothy, was seized by profound anguish upon receiving the grievous tidings. With an immediacy borne of heartfelt sorrow, Clare reached out to Frida, proffering a sum of $400 to commission a commemorative portrait of the departed soul. [2] Clare's noble aspiration was to bestow this poignant tableau upon Dorothy's bereaved mother, a matron engulfed in the desolate agony of outliving her progeny, thereby immortalizing the ethereal beauty that Dorothy had embodied in life. She imparted to Frida her vision that this evocative masterpiece would grace the space above the hearth in Dorothy's mother's parlor, a sanctum where memories would flicker like the enduring flames of remembrance.

In the sultry August of 1939, Clare Boothe Luce received the long-awaited commission from Frida Kahlo, her heart brimming with anticipatory reverence. Yet, as she unwrapped the parcel with trembling hands, her soul was assailed by a visage so macabre that it nearly rendered her insensate. Far from the conventional elegiac portrait Clare had envisioned, Frida had conjured a tableau of such visceral intensity that it laid bare the harrowing saga of Dorothy Hale's self-inflicted demise in a manner both unflinching and transcendent.

The painting, a masterwork of meticulous detail, unfolded the tragic narrative with unsparing clarity: from Dorothy's solitary figure poised on the balcony's precipice, to her precipitous descent through the void, and finally to her lifeless form, shattered and bloodied upon the unforgiving ground. Each moment was rendered with a precision that bordered on the forensic, yet imbued with an otherworldly aura.

Dorothy, as she stood upon the balcony, was depicted as a diminutive, almost spectral figure, her presence already attenuated, as though she had begun her inexorable retreat from the mortal coil. In her plunge, she was enveloped in a shroud of ethereal, lavender-hued mist, her body inverted, her eyes a vortex of disillusionment and mistrust, devoid of any vestige of earthly attachment. Her garments, their once-vibrant hues now muted and indistinct, melded seamlessly with the velvety, enigmatic fog, as though the very fabric of her being was dissolving into the ephemeral embrace of the beyond. This haunting portrayal was not merely a depiction of death, but a profound meditation on the fragility of existence and the

inexorable pull of oblivion.

The act of suicide -- her descent through the air -- was rendered as a surreal, almost transcendent performance, a chiaroscuro of chaos and hazy luster, a hauntingly beautiful romantic tragedy. Yet, the depiction of its culmination -- the moment of impact -- was jarringly stark, a visceral embodiment of the Chinese idiom "as far apart as heaven and earth" (Chinese pronunciation: tiān rǎng zhī bié). When her body collided with the ground, the brutal reality erupted in a sanguineous tableau. Blood, which she had long ceased to care for, erupted from her temples and ears, a grotesque contrast to the elegance she had once embodied.

It was only then that the viewer could discern the details of her final attire -- the black evening gown she had so adored in life, still exuding an air of grace, the yellow rose corsage still blooming with delicate vibrancy. Yet, blood seeped from beneath her still-slender waist, staining the fabric, while her delicate arms were drenched in crimson. Most chilling of all were her eyes, which remained obstinately open, brimming with a sorrowful resolve and an unyielding, almost accusatory gaze, as if refusing to grant the world the closure of her final rest.

No wonder Clare, upon her initial encounter with this harrowing masterpiece, was seized by a profound sense of dread and despair, her spirit crushed under the weight of its unrelenting truth. So overwhelming was her reaction that she briefly contemplated destroying the painting, only to be persuaded by friends to preserve it [3], a testament to the raw, unflinching power of Frida's vision.

2.2 Frida Kahlo's Blood-Soaked Retablo:

Faith, Blasphemy, and An Elegy of Mourning

What renders this painting particularly contentious is its execution in the form of an "ex-voto" painting, or "retablo", a devotional art form steeped in profound spiritual and cultural significance. Since the European colonizers implanted the seeds of Christian faith across the vast expanse of Latin America, the tradition of "ex-voto" paintings or "retablo" has flourished, becoming a poignant medium for expressing divine gratitude and human vulnerability. Whether it be recovery from a grave illness or survival amidst the cataclysmic fury of earthquakes and floods, devout Christians have fervently believed that such deliverance was wrought through prayer, a testament to God's merciful intervention. [4]

On humble canvases of thin tin sheets, the local artisans of Mexico have poured forth their tribulations and their gratitude, capturing both the harrowing trials they endured and the divine grace that spared them. These works, often imbued with a raw, almost naive sincerity, serve as visual prayers, a fusion of the sacred and the personal, where the boundaries between the mortal and the divine blur in a tapestry of faith and survival. [5] Frida's appropriation of this form for her depiction of Dorothy Hale's tragic end thus becomes a provocative act, intertwining the sacred tradition of "ex-voto" painting or "retablo" with the secular, yet deeply personal, narrative of loss and remembrance.

The "ex-voto" painting or "retablo", a devotional artifact of profound spiritual resonance, is meticulously composed of two distinct yet harmonious elements. The upper eighty to ninety percent of the canvas is devoted to a vivid tableau, a visual narrative that captures the divine intervention in human affairs. For instance, it might depict a man afflicted with crippled legs, his family kneeling in fervent supplication, while Christ or the Virgin Mary manifests in a celestial apparition amidst the clouds, bestowing a miraculous restoration of mobility upon the once-bedridden sufferer. These scenes are rendered with a poignant clarity, a testament to the power of faith and the tangible presence of the divine in the lives of the faithful. [6]

Separated typically by a horizontal line, the lower ten to twenty percent of the painting is reserved for the inscription, or the dedicatory text. This portion articulates the narrative's intricate details -- the sequence of events, the raison d'être for the creation of the artwork, and a litany of praises extolling the boundless love and omnipotence of God. These words, often imbued with a reverential eloquence, serve as a verbal counterpart to the visual narrative, encapsulating the essence of the devotee's gratitude and devotion. [7]

In essence, the "ex-voto" painting or "retablo" stands as an artistic manifestation of Christian faith, a tangible expression of the believer's journey through tribulation to redemption, and a perpetual homage to the divine grace that permeates their existence. [8]

Frida Kahlo's personal collection boasted numerous retablos, those poignant devotional paintings that encapsulate moments of divine intervention and human gratitude. [9] It looks like that her commemorative work for Dorothy Hale is meticulously crafted within this venerable tradition. The painting, bifurcated by a deliberate horizontal line, presents a harrowing tableau above: Dorothy's tragic leap from the vertiginous heights of the Hampshire House, a scene imbued with both visceral immediacy and spectral detachment. Below this evocative imagery, an inscription is elegantly rendered, its words a somber testament to the event it memorializes:

"In New York City on the 21st of October 1938, at 6:00 in the morning, Dorothy Hale committed suicide by throwing herself from a very high window in the Hampshire House. In her memory, this retablo was executed by Frida Kahlo."

Is this, then, truly the case? To those unacquainted with the tenets of Christian faith, this painting might appear as a mere transposition of an art form -- popularized in Mexico through Spanish colonial influence -- onto a memorial portrait, ren-

dering it uniquely unconventional and strikingly distinctive. However, to the devout Christian eye, such an act is nothing short of sacrilege. Suicide, long condemned by Christian doctrine as an affront to the sanctity of life, is viewed with profound solemnity; the souls of those who take their own lives are believed to be consigned to the abyss of hell. Consequently, the bodies of suicides have historically been denied burial in consecrated church grounds or even in proximity to sacred spaces, a practice that persists to this day.

Thus, the use of the ex-voto or retablo form -- a medium traditionally reserved for glorifying God's mercy and miraculous interventions -- to commemorate the suicide of Dorothy Hale is perceived by the faithful as a grievous desecration, an act that verges on blasphemy. To them, it is an unthinkable inversion of a sacred tradition, a profane appropriation of a devotional art form to honor a life ended in a manner deemed irreconcilable with divine will. This tension between artistic innovation and religious orthodoxy underscores the provocative nature of Frida's work, a bold and controversial gesture that challenges the boundaries of faith, art, and memory.

Frida created this painting during a period of separation from Diego, a time when she herself was ensnared in the throes of heartbreak, depression, and despair, even contemplating suicide. [10] Perhaps this work indirectly conveys her questioning of the very existence of God, or perhaps it is a plea for divine forgiveness and understanding. Regardless, the visual impact of the painting far exceeded the emotional capacity of Dorothy's friends and family.

To begin with, the figure soaring through clouds and mist should, by all traditional conventions, be Christ, the Virgin Mary, or an angel. Yet here, it is Dorothy, mid-plunge from a towering height, a substitution that is both shocking and sacrilegious. To further evoke the illusion of a eulogy written in blood, Frida deliberately painted pools of blood in the dedicatory text section, each drop seemingly trembling and screaming in agony. The words themselves appear as though infected with a feverish crimson hue, as if stricken by a scarlet malaise. The blood even spills chaotically and messily onto the frame itself.

This confined space swells with the presence of blood, yet is simultaneously constrained by it. No matter how dreamlike and ethereal the sensation of falling through the clouds may seem, the moment of bone-shattering impact and bloodshed is the brutal return to reality. Dreams suspended in the heavens must inevitably crash to earth, and only pain can awaken the soul. In the moment of release, life itself is extinguished.

Although The Suicide of Dorothy Hale stands, in certain respects, as a stark deviation from Christian orthodoxy -- Frida having seemingly chosen the incongruous medium of an ex-voto or retablo to portray a visceral and sanguine tragedy -- this does not, by any measure, suggest that Frida was inherently anti-Christian. Indeed, her relationship with the Christian faith was a labyrinth of profound complexity and emotional depth. On one hand, her existence was a relentless odyssey of tribulation, a life so marred by the capricious cruelty of fate that the very notion of a benevolent God appeared not only dubious but almost mocking. On the other hand, it was precisely through this crucible of unrelenting suffering that God, for Frida, became a paradoxical beacon of solace and redemption -- a divine presence that both haunted and healed. Thus, her faith was not a mere binary of belief or rejection, but a richly textured tapestry woven with threads of doubt, anguish, and an almost desperate yearning for spiritual transcendence.

Therefore, The Suicide of Dorothy Hale could be regarded as a poignant homage, bridging the sacred tradition of the "retablo" with the deeply personal narrative of loss and remembrance. Through this act of artistic devotion, Frida not only honors Dorothy's memory but also intertwines her own voice with the centuries-old practice of visual storytelling, creating a work that is as much a prayer as it is a masterpiece.

3. Tree of Hope, Remain Strong (1946): Frida Kahlo's Blood-Stained Ode to Resilience

In 1946, Frida Kahlo underwent yet another surgical procedure in the United States. Upon her return to Mexico, she was confined to wearing a steel medical corset for eight interminable months. Despite this, her health continued its inexorable decline. The excruciating pain in her spine rendered her restless, unable to find solace whether sitting or lying down. [11] As the adage goes, joyful moments fleetingly vanish, while periods of suffering stretch endlessly, each second a torment. In this crucible of agony, she once again channeled her misfortune and indomitable spirit onto the canvas. That same year, she created Tree of Hope, Remain Strong, a painting bifurcated into two distinct realms:

On the right side of the canvas, Frida lies on an operating table, her back turned to the viewer. The white sheet, resembling a shroud, wraps around her shoulders and hips, while her chestnut hair cascades limply downward. Two ghastly incisions mar her spine, their jagged edges oozing blood that seems to snarl and writhe. The calamities and trials she has endured, her resentment, and her vehement indictment of fate's injustice are all laid bare, each drop of blood seeping into the viewer's consciousness, a visceral testament to her suffering.

On the left side of the canvas, Frida sits regally upon a broad wooden chair, adorned in the resplendent elegance of a Te-



Image 3. Tree of Hope, Remain Strong (1946), by Frida Kahlo

Website Resource: https://www.fridakahlo.org/tree-of-hope.jsp

huana dress. Her hair is meticulously coiffed, crowned with a bow-like floral ornament, while golden earrings dangle from her lobes, and an opulent necklace graces her neck. Yet, starkly incongruous with this tableau of grandeur is the cold, metallic medical corset she clutches in her left hand. Its four steel rings resemble spectral tendrils, constricting her chest, rendering the vibrant, embroidered splendor of her Tehuana dress eerily impotent. Her powdered face bears faint traces of tears, but the sorrow etched upon it is restrained, dignified—devoid of histrionics or melodrama, seeking no pity.

In her right hand, she holds a banner inscribed with the Spanish words, "Árbol de la Esperanza, Mantente Firme" (Tree of Hope, Remain Strong), a phrase drawn from the Mexican song Cielito Lindo. This declaration, both a plea and a defiant affirmation, serves as a beacon of resilience amidst the tempest of her suffering. The juxtaposition of her resplendent attire and the grim reality of her physical torment creates a poignant tension, a testament to her unyielding spirit in the face of relentless adversity.

Both the operating table and the wooden chair are set upon a desiccated, fissured earth, its vast, elongated, and unfathomable crevices symbolizing wounds. This landscape, reminiscent of the aftermath of an earthquake or a prolonged drought, serves as the backdrop in many of Frida Kahlo's paintings, emblematic of a perpetually wounded self. On the right side of the canvas, the sun blazes mercilessly, while on the left, the moon bathes the scene in its serene, silvery light. This stark contrast between day and night evokes a mood deeply rooted in Mexico's geography and ecological environment. The scorching daylight, intense enough to make the mythical subterranean lizard-people emit smoke, is juxtaposed with the gentle, healing luminescence of the moon, which soothes parched souls.

Thus, the Frida on the left side of the canvas appears to be in the process of self-healing. The tender, moonlit glow caresses her tear-streaked cheeks and her still-unhealed wounds, offering a balm to her fractured spirit. This interplay of celestial forces not only underscores the duality of her existence but also mirrors the cyclical nature of suffering and solace, a poignant reflection of her enduring resilience.

Reflecting on this painting, Frida once remarked, "There is a skeleton -- death fleeing before my will to survive." [12] This statement reveals a stark contrast to her earlier work, The Two Fridas (1939), where both figures were depicted as emotionally wounded. In this piece, however, Frida deliberately crafts a duality: one figure embodies weakness, the other strength; one is a victim, the other a survivor; one awaits rescue, the other is the valiant savior. This dichotomy serves to underscore her defiance against fate.

Yet, Frida is acutely aware that misfortune will strike again. The specter of death looms like a ceaselessly sounding alarm, its threat never fully dispelled. Thus, the precipice of an abyss lies hidden beneath the folds of her long skirt, and the word "hope" -- at times unyielding, at others fragile and elusive -- teeters on the brink of plunging into the void. This precarious balance is the painting's most disquieting aspect, leaving viewers in a state of perpetual unease, a haunting reminder of the fragility of hope and the ever-present shadow of mortality.

Frida is a complex amalgamation of fragility and fortitude, a living paradox. Yet, who is not? Is this not the very essence of authentic humanity? Who among us has not known moments of despondency and melancholy? Who does not aspire to resilience and unyielding determination? And who would willingly succumb to the caprices of fate? A person of genuine emotion wears their joys and sorrows openly, while an artist of unbridled passion pours their heart onto the canvas. To weep is to weep unabashedly; to laugh is to laugh with unbridled joy. Both tears and laughter are interwoven into the very fabric of our blood, the life force that courses through our veins, bearing witness to the full spectrum of human experience.

Frida Kahlo's Tree of Hope, Remain Strong is not merely a painting; it is a portal into the depths of human endurance, a symphony of pain and resilience that resonates with the universal struggle against fate's cruel whims. Through her art, Frida transforms her suffering into a language that speaks to

the soul, a language where blood and tears become the ink of existence, and hope flickers like a fragile flame in the face of an encroaching void. The duality she portrays -- between victim and survivor, despair and defiance, the blazing sun and the soothing moon -- mirrors the eternal dance of light and shadow within us all. Her work is a testament to the indomitable spirit that refuses to be extinguished, even as the body falters and the world crumbles.

In this masterpiece, Frida does not merely depict her own suffering; she invites us to confront our own. The fissured earth beneath her feet is not just a symbol of her wounds but a reflection of the fractures within every human heart. The banner she holds, inscribed with "Árbol de la Esperanza, Mantente Firme", is not just a personal plea but a universal call to resilience, a reminder that hope, however fragile, is a force that can defy even the darkest abyss. Yet, Frida's art does not offer easy solace. The precipice hidden beneath her skirt, the ever-looming specter of death, and the blood that seeps into the canvas all serve as stark reminders of life's precariousness. Her work is a mirror held up to the human condition, reflecting both our fragility and our capacity for transcendence.

Through Tree of Hope, Remain Strong, Frida Kahlo becomes more than an artist; she becomes a prophet of the human spirit, a voice that speaks across time and space to remind us of our shared vulnerability and our shared strength. Her art is a bridge between the personal and the universal, the sacred and the profane, the ephemeral and the eternal. In her hands, pain, especially the image of blood and bleeding, becomes poetry, and suffering becomes a testament to the resilience of the soul. Frida's legacy is not just her art but her unyielding belief in the power of hope, a belief that continues to inspire and challenge us to remain strong, even in the face of life's most harrowing storms.

4. After Frida Kahlo:

The Avant-Garde Artists' Blood Sacrifice and Transcendence

Frida Kahlo is not the sole artist to have been galvanized by suffering and bloodshed in the pursuit of artistic creation. Born in 1928, Yves Klein, the vanguard of French Nouveau Réalisme and a pioneering force in the realm of performance art, was once profoundly captivated by the concepts of void and immateriality. On a certain day in October 1960, driven by an insatiable desire to experience and convey the sensation of weightlessness and the body's plunge into the abyss, he cast aside all concern for his own mortality. Without any protective measures, he leapt from the second-floor window of a building on Rue Gentil-Bernard in the suburbs of Paris. This audacious act of aerial defiance was captured by the lens of photographer Harry Shunk, and the resulting image was later published by Klein in his self-founded newspaper, Dimanche 27 Novembre 1960. He christened this performance piece Le peintre de l'espace se jette dans le vide (The Painter of Space Leaps into the Void). [13]



Image 4. Le Saut dans le vide (Leap into the Void); photomontage by Shunk-Kender (Harry Shunk and Janos Kender) of a performance by Klein at Rue Gentil-Bernard, Fontenay-aux-Roses, October 1960

Website Resource: https://www.laboiteverte.fr/les-coulisses-du-saut-dans-le-vide-dyves-klein/

Reflecting on the experience of pain and blood, Klein mused, "Sensation is that which exists outside our own existence, yet eternally belongs to us." [14] This ethereal and almost ineffable imagination, when fused with the raw, visceral realities of pain and blood, transforms into an enduring artwork, forever intertwined with the essence of life itself. Through this act, Klein transcended the mundane, elevating the ephemeral and the corporeal into a sublime testament to the human spirit's unyielding quest for meaning and transcendence.

The French artist Michel Journiac (b. 1935) stands as one of the seminal figures in the invention of body art, a movement that redefined the boundaries of artistic expression. His work, both poetic and subversive, is a searing critique of societal norms, interrogating the ways in which bodies are commodified, ritualized, and controlled by the structures of power. Journiac's practice, which melds performance, photography, and visceral materiality, is a relentless exploration of identity, sacrifice, and the sacred within the profane.

In 1969, Journiac erupted onto the art scene with Messe pour un corps (Mass for a Body), a performance that was as spectacular as it was provocative. In this radical act, he distributed fake communion hosts crafted from black pudding infused with his own blood, transforming the Eucharist -- a symbol of spiritual transcendence -- into a visceral, corporeal ritual. [15] This act was not merely a gesture of shock but a profound reimagining of the sacred, where the body itself became both the altar and the offering. By substituting the traditional wafer with a substance imbued with his own life force, Journiac challenged the boundaries between the spiritual and the physical, the sacred and the grotesque, forcing viewers to confront the raw, unvarnished reality of existence.

Journiac's works and actions were a deliberate attempt to dismantle and reverse the rituals that reduce bodies to mere objects, malleable and disposable at the whims of society. Through his art, he sought to reclaim the body as a site of resistance, autonomy, and profound meaning. His performances were not just acts of rebellion but acts of reclamation, where the body -- often his own—became a canvas for exploring the intersections of identity, power, and mortality. In doing so, Journiac not only pushed the limits of what art could be but also redefined the role of the artist as both creator and provocateur, challenging audiences to see the world -- and themselves -- in radically new ways. His legacy is one of fearless innovation, a testament to the transformative power of art to disrupt, provoke, and ultimately liberate.

In 1975, in a performance piece titled Le corps pressenti ("The Foreseen Body"), the French-Italian artist Gina Pane (b. 1939) embarked on a visceral and audacious exploration of the body as both medium and message. With a razor blade, she meticulously incised the delicate flesh between her toes, allowing her blood to flow freely and irrevocably onto a plaster cast beneath her feet. [16] This act was not merely a physical intervention but a profound, almost sacramental gesture, where pain and vulnerability became the raw materials of her art. The blood, pooling and drying on the white plaster, left behind permanent stains -- a haunting testament to the fragility of the human form and the indelible marks of existence.

Gina Pane's work, rooted in the radical ethos of body art, transcended traditional boundaries, challenging the viewer to confront the corporeal reality of suffering and endurance. Her performance was a bold declaration of the body's capacity to bear witness, to transform agony into a language of resistance and beauty. In this act, she not only pushed the limits of artistic expression but also redefined the relationship between artist, audience, and the ephemeral nature of creation. The blood-stained plaster became a relic, a tangible echo of a moment where art and life bled into one another, leaving an indelible imprint on the collective consciousness of those who bore witness. Through this unflinching act, Gina Pane affirmed the body as a site of both destruction and renewal, a canvas where the most primal and profound truths of human experience are laid bare.

In 1974, Petr Štembera (b. 1945), a trailblazer of Czech body art and action art, executed a profoundly provocative and ritualistic performance titled Narcissus #1. This work was a raw, unflinching exploration of self-identity, transformation, and the boundaries of the human body as both subject and medium. Štembera stood before an altar, its solemnity heightened by the flickering glow of lit candles, and fixed his gaze upon a self-portrait—a mirror of his own existence. The atmosphere was charged with an almost sacred intensity, as if the act itself were a sacrament of self-confrontation.

In a gesture that blurred the lines between creation and destruction, Štembera drew blood from his own body using a hypodermic needle, a stark symbol of both medical precision and self-inflicted vulnerability. He then combined this blood with his urine, hair, and nail clippings, crafting a visceral concoction that embodied the very essence of his physical being. In a climactic act of transgression and transcendence, he consumed this mixture before the altar, a ritualistic ingestion that transformed the act of self-reflection into one of self-annihilation and rebirth. [17]

This performance was not merely an artistic statement but a radical reimagining of the myth of Narcissus, where self-obsession is not a passive gaze but an active, almost violent engagement with one's own corporeality. Štembera's work challenged the boundaries of art, pushing the limits of what could be considered both material and meaning. By incorporating elements of his own body—fluids, fragments, and flesh—he turned the act of creation into a deeply personal and universal meditation on existence, mortality, and the fragile beauty of the human condition. Narcissus #1 stands as a testament to the power of art to confront, disturb, and ultimately transform, leaving an indelible mark on the history of avant-garde performance.

Born in 1970, the Filipino artist Elito Villaflor Circa who has embraced blood as his artistic medium, crafting surreal masterpieces that pulsate with imagination and tension. He once said: "My artwork is very important to me because they come from me, it is from my own blood, my DNA is part of it... My philosophy is that life is circular and everything is a cycle, so (my blood) is a tool that serves as a reminder of where I came from." [18] His works, steeped in the visceral and the otherworldly, transcend conventional boundaries, offering a glimpse into a realm where the corporeal and the ethereal intertwine. Through his use of blood, Elito Villaflor Circa has transformed the very essence of life into a conduit for art, creating pieces that are as deeply personal as they are universally resonant.

Born in 1982, the American painter and tattoo artist Vincent Castiglia, in a quest to forge the most intimate connection between his own being and his art, conceived the audacious idea of painting with his own blood. For over a decade, he



Image 5. Panta Phase III (2013), by Elito Villaflor Circa

Website Resource: https://tl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elito_Circa

has drawn 450 milliliters of blood from his body each month, using it to concoct a macabre palette for his creations. This sanguine medium, imbued with the essence of his life force, perfectly complements his Gothic, darkly evocative style, rendering his works as haunting as they are profound. Vincent Castiglia's works have not only shocked the New York art scene but have also gained widespread acclaim across North America. According to his own recollections and narratives, his childhood was shrouded in shadows and scars. His mother, having endured severe abuse, developed profound psychiatric disorders, transforming from a victim into an abuser. Growing up in an extremely distorted environment, his mother once cursed him with a chilling tone: "I should've ripped you out of me while I had the chance, with a hanger!" The old house he lived in during his childhood was damp and cold, with mold spreading across the ceilings and walls. In the corners of the house, layers of dead mice piled up, rotting and emitting a foul stench, yet he was forbidden from disposing of them. The intense pain carved a deep, bloody scar in his soul. He once remarked, "There was a point at which I actually started to believe I was on earth just to suffer. As if I had come into this world with bad karma, and this was reality's way of burning it out of me. Whatever past life atrocities I had committed apparently warranted brutality in my current life." [19] Art became his means of confronting and exorcising his nightmares. He utilized every medium he could find to create, including blood. In a sense, he shares a similarity with Frida Kahlo, as both sought to overcome their suffering by re-experiencing it through their art. If Frida Kahlo's paintings exude blood in the realm of visual imagery and aesthetics, then Vincent Castiglia's works are akin to eerie ballads sung in blood.



Image 6. Parable of The Mole (2008), by Vincent Castiglia

Website Resource: https://crypticrock.com/interview-vincent-castiglia/

5. Conclusions: The Transformative Power of Blood in the Artistic Explorations

It is difficult to assert with certainty whether the artists who who incorporated the element of blood into their art, or even used it directly as a medium -- were directly influenced by Frida. Yet, it is undeniable that they, alongside her, have collectively forged a singular and striking tableau within the annals of art history.

Frida Kahlo, Yves Klein, Michel Journiac, Gina Pane, Petr Štembera, Elito Villaflor Circa, and Vincent Castiglia -- each of these artists, in their own distinct yet interconnected ways, has harnessed the potent symbolism of blood to explore the depths of human existence. For Frida, blood was a visceral language of pain and resilience, a medium through which she articulated her physical suffering and emotional turmoil. Her works, steeped in personal anguish, transform blood into a metaphor for both vulnerability and defiance, a testament to the enduring spirit in the face of life's relentless trials. In contrast, Yves Klein's Le peintre de l'espace se jette dans le vide (The Painter of Space Leaps into the Void) uses the concept of blood and bodily risk to transcend the physical, seeking weightlessness and immateriality. His leap into the void is a metaphysical gesture, where blood becomes a symbol of liberation from earthly constraints.

Michel Journiac and Gina Pane, on the other hand, employ blood as a tool of subversion and ritual. Journiac's Messe pour un corps (Mass for a Body) transforms blood into a sacred offering, challenging the boundaries between the spiritual and the grotesque, while Pane's Le corps pressenti (The Foreseen Body) uses blood to confront the fragility of the human form, turning pain into a language of resistance. Similarly, Petr Štembera's Narcissus #1 and Vincent Castiglia's

blood paintings delve into the corporeal, using blood as a medium to explore identity, mortality, and the raw essence of life. Elito Villaflor Circa's surreal works, meanwhile, infuse blood with a dreamlike quality, blending the visceral with the ethereal.

While Frida's use of blood is deeply personal and rooted in her physical and emotional suffering, the other artists expand its symbolism into broader existential and metaphysical realms. Evidently, under the influence of the body art and performance art movements of the 1970s, artists' creative methods and processes became increasingly radical, with blood almost serving as a pivotal element in defining the artistic style and stance of certain creators. In contrast, Frida Kahlo's work appears somewhat more conventional, as it did not achieve a breakthrough in terms of artistic medium. Yet, all share a common thread: the transformation of blood from a mere biological substance into a profound artistic medium, a conduit for exploring the intersections of pain, identity, and transcendence. Together, they form a constellation of creators whose works pulsate with the raw, visceral energy of human experience, transforming pain and vitality into a profound and enduring aesthetic legacy, broadening the boundaries of art.

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Re-envisioning the Aura — The Manifestation and Application of Mythological Value Forms in the Cultural and Creative Industries

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Abstract: Primordial humans created myths rooted in their reverence for the natural world as divine. In their consciousness, all elements of their surroundings were imbued with a unique "aura" — a halo of authenticity and sacredness. However, with the advent of the technological age of replication, from mechanical to digital reproduction, the "aura" of artworks or myths, as Walter Benjamin theorized, has gradually dissipated. Narratives and artistic works, once confined to the veiled sanctity of ritualistic worship, were liberated from their primordial womb, drawing closer to human existence and mass culture. As myths increasingly permeate everyday life, they have shifted from serving solely ritualistic-magical ends to undergoing continuous value transformation within the cultural industry, traversing from one pole of static tradition to another of dynamic reinvention.

How can the "Aura" of Mythology Survive Dissolution in the Ocean of Mass Culture?—Reconstructing a Network of Secular Integration Without Distortion, and Unleashing the Driving Force of Cultural Creativity Through Mythic Narratives The "aura" of mythology, once rooted in sacred authenticity, now faces existential threats as it drowns in the tides of mass culture. The critical challenge lies in capturing its fading traces—like grasping a wisp of smoke—and reweaving them into a dynamic network that both integrates into secular society and resists distortion or overexploitation. Central to this endeavor is harnessing mythology's inherent storytelling power to activate latent creative energies within the cultural and creative industries.

Key words: Aura; Mythology; Narrative; Cultural and Creativ Industrie; Value Transformation; Cultural Consumption; Technological Reproduction

Chapter 1 Introduction

Section 1.1 Research Purpose and Significance

Walter Benjamin elevated the concept of the "aura" to an artistic level, theorizing its role in artworks. Today, mythic narratives embedded in such "aura"-laden works have become a highly sought-after creative prototype in the cultural industry. The rich cultural, economic, and social values they embody are being reinterpreted and repurposed across industries to varying degrees. This reimagining of myths and reconfiguration of the aura has yielded numerous successful cases, regardless of sector. This paper explores methods of reconstructing the "aura" within the cultural and creative industries through the lens of mythology.

As an indispensable part of Chinese traditional culture, mythic stories exist fragmentarily throughout history, lacking a cohesive system. Yet their creation is deeply intertwined with human sensory experiences and emotional responses to the external world.[Yuan Ke, Ancient Chinese Mythology, Huaxia Publishing House, 2006, p. 2.] Primitive artworks, serving as vessels for myths and ritualistic narratives, possessed a "cult value" exclusive to their sacred function, characterized by an unreproducible and inaccessible "aura." In The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Benjamin systematically elaborates on the "aura" and discusses how mechanical reproduction triggers its dissolution, leading to a transformation of value.

Furthermore, in The Storyteller, Benjamin proposes that the

"aura" can be transmitted through the traditional art of storytelling. He frames storytelling as an act of "transferring experience," where the tale's portrayal of worldly phenomena merges with the storyteller's life before disseminating to the audience.[Yuan Ke, Ancient Chinese Mythology, Huaxia Publishing House, 2006, p. 25]] [Walter Benjamin, The Storyteller.] However, the rise of mechanical reproduction technologies—such as printing—spurred the proliferation of novels and news media, which diverged from the oral tradition of storytelling. This shift precipitated the decline of storytelling as an art form, a phenomenon that may also be interpreted as the withering of the narrative "aura."

Mythological narratives, emerging from primal societies, served as survival mechanisms for early humans with limited productive capacities. To endure harsh natural environments, they conjured heroic figures—symbols of resilience—to inspire collective perseverance against adversity. Simultaneously, myths arose to explain phenomena beyond their comprehension, giving birth to deities as a "collectively imagined reality." These intangible beliefs coalesced communities, gradually evolving into ethnic identities. Such shared convictions may be interpreted as the "aura" embedded in collective consciousness—a manifestation of the communal "dream." Mythologist Joseph Campbell once stated, "Myths are public dreams; dreams are private myths." [Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces.] Similarly, as noted in Myths, Legends, and Beliefs of the Black Tortoise (edited by Ye Shuxian), "Myths are the source of literature and culture, embodying the dreams of human communities." [Ye Shuxian (ed.), Chen Qiwen, Myths, Legends, and Beliefs of the Black Tortoise, Shaanxi Normal University Press, 2013, p. 1.]

In contemporary society, the "aura" of mythic narratives undergoes dual trajectories: dissolution and renaissance. While mechanical reproduction erodes the cult value of myths in artworks, the ascendancy of cultural and creative industries has transformed myths into consumable cultural symbols. Within this paradigm, mythic storytelling reemerges as a potent archetype for creative innovation. The narrative potency of myths—bridging ancient symbolism and modern relevance—is revitalizing their role as catalytic forces in cultural production, attracting renewed scholarly and industrial attention.

Today, consumers no longer prioritize merely the utilitarian function of products but increasingly value experiential engagement and the sensory-emotional resonance evoked during consumption—a phenomenon where products act as conduits for self-reflective perception. Simultaneously, the cultural and creative industries face inherent uncertainties in consumer satisfaction. Producers struggle to predict the subjective preferences of buyers, who may or may not embrace new products, leading to potential discrepancies due to asymmetric information alignment between supply and demand. [Richard E. Caves, Creative Industries: Contracts between Art and Commerce, translated by Sun Fei et al., Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House, preface p. 4, 2004.] Such misalignments risk fostering a cycle of producers blindly chasing transient consumer trends—a precarious strategy in myth-driven markets.

Mythological narratives now permeate diverse industries, targeting heterogeneous consumer demographics through multifaceted formats. Market analyses reveal that within China's cultural and creative sector, mythological archetypes fuel the explosive growth of online literature genres—such as fantasy, science fiction, wuxia (martial heroes), and xianxia (immortal heroes)—which in turn inspire film, television, and gaming adaptations. This trend underscores myths' protean adaptability as premium creative content. However, critical challenges persist:Bridging the gap between story-driven creativity and contemporary cultural-entertainment consumption patterns;Upholding ethically anchored value systems during mythic reinterpretation to avoid narrative dilution or ideological drift.This paper interrogates how mythological storytelling can negotiate these tensions, proposing frameworks to harmonize commercial viability with cultural integrity in the age of symbolic capitalism.

Amidst the prevailing trend of "aestheticization of everyday life" in the creative economy, this study seeks to explore how traditional Chinese myths and supernatural tales can be revitalized through culturally innovative storytelling techniques. By reimagining these narratives in a new "linguistic form," the author aims to foster interactive resonance between ancient traditions and modern audiences within the cultural and creative industries. Central to this endeavor is mythic retelling—a creative process that begins with excavating the profound symbolism embedded in archaic texts.

While myths and legends from antiquity persist in classical canons and folk literature, they often exist as fragmented, elliptical accounts. Reconstructing them for contemporary consumption demands a dual approach:

1.Deep Archeological Engagement: Unearthing latent cultural codes and cosmological wisdom obscured by millennia of textual brevity;

2.Canonical Fidelity with Creative Rupture: Innovating while preserving the "original essence" (yuandian xing)—the fixed cultural ethos and symbolic meanings crystallized through centuries of transmission. As scholar Bai Ye notes, such retellings face inherent tensions: "Mythic narratives carry archetypal cultural DNA; their creative adaptation requires balancing reverence with reinvention."[Bai Ye, "Retelling Myths: A Win-Win for Literature and Cultural Creativity", Literature and Art Daily, May 23, 2007.]

This paper investigates how the reactivated aura of mythic narratives—after periods of cultural sedimentation—generates new value within creative industries. It analyzes how consumers, through immersive engagement, participate in

the resurrection of mythic aura amidst ongoing value transformations. [Ibid.] Echoing this dynamic, Japanese artist Takashi Murakami observes in The Extreme Theory of Creativity: "Individual creativity thrives on cognitive multiplicity, while organizational creativity hinges on structural strategy. To achieve global relevance, one must shatter conventional paradigms while honoring ancestral wisdom."

Within the thematic cluster of "Mythology and Chinese Cultural Development", 20 relevant papers were identified, focusing on topics such as the evolution of mythic narratives, the interplay between zhiguai (supernatural tales) and traditional culture, and the relationship between mythic fiction and religious development. Among these, nine articles provide critical insights for this study:

1.**Wu Hung,** "Transmediation and Interpretation in Visual Art" [published in Fine Arts Panorama], examines the challenges of interpreting artworks like Freud's analysis of Michelangelo's Moses in an era of cross-media reproduction. By interrogating how digital platforms "transmediate" classical art into fragmented visual codes, Wu argues for a hermeneutic approach that reconciles auratic authenticity with decentralized digital consumption.

2.**Wei Fengjuan**, "From 'Earthly Netherworld' to 'Buddhist Hell': The Evolution of Afterlife Concepts in Wei-Jin Supernatural Tales", traces the transformation of the Chinese underworld from a continuation of human society (Han Dynasty,-from 202 BC to 220 AD) to a karmic tribunal (post-Buddhist integration). Her study reveals how syncretism between Daoist cosmology, Confucian ethics, and Buddhist reincarnation doctrines reshaped death narratives in zhiguai literature, offering a framework to analyze mythic adaptation as cultural hybridization.

3.**Wei Aitang**, "The Dialectic of Myth/History: An Anthropological Perspective", deconstructs the binary opposition between myth as "collective memory" and history as "factual record." Through cross-cultural case studies, Wei posits that myths and histories exist in a symbiotic continuum, co-evolving through dynamic reinterpretations—a paradigm crucial for understanding myth's role in contemporary cultural industries.

4.**Wu Xiaodong** (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), in "Mythic Representation and Research in Pluralistic Contexts"[Pingdingshan University Journal, 2017] , identifies deep-structural parallels across global myth systems. He contends that apparent divergences stem from cultural fragmentation rather than primordial differences, proposing a "unified mythic archetype" theory to guide transcultural creative adaptations.

5**.Yang Xian**'s doctoral dissertation Studies on Han Dynasty Mythology[(Sichuan Normal University, 2012)] comprehensively examines Han-era myths through four dimensions: historical context, ideological-cultural frameworks, textual sources, and their literary legacy. By analyzing ritual bronze inscriptions and tomb murals, Yang reveals how Han myths functioned as political cosmologies, legitimizing imperial authority while encoding folk beliefs into official historiography.

6.**Ye Shuxian**, in How to Retell Myths [Journal of Yangtze University, Social Sciences Edition, Vol. 29 No. 1, 2006], philosophically interrogates 21st-century mythic adaptation. He advocates for archetypal alchemy—a process where narrative archetypes are revitalized through metaphorical displacement and intertextual layering, arguing that mythic retelling must "transmute archaic symbols into electrolytes of contemporary consciousness."

Additional pivotal works include:

Zhang Yan's Three Grand Motifs in Chinese Mythology [Shandong University, 2014], which identifies creation-cataclysm, heroic trials, and cosmic renewal as foundational narrative matrices shaping Chinese mythopoetic traditions.

Guo Fang's Ancient Chinese Mythology and National Cultural Spirit [Guanzi Journal, No. 1, 2000], tracing how primordial myths like Pangu's cosmogony crystallized Confucian-Daoist syntheses of 天人合一 (Heaven-Human unity).

Within the research domain of "Cultural and Creative Industries, Mythic Narratives, and Ethnic Culture", 18 relevant papers were identified, of which three hold significant reference value:

1.**Lou Yunhe**'s "Reconstruction of Ethnic Elements from a Cultural Policy Perspective: A Correlative Study" [Chinese National Academy of Arts, 2011]investigates how state cultural policies shape the commodification of traditional ethnic elements in the era of economic globalization and digitalization. Lou argues that national policy frameworks—encompassing value-oriented principles, institutional mechanisms, and resource allocation strategies—serve as both catalysts and regulators in transforming cultural heritage into commercial assets. Her analysis underscores the dual role of policy: enabling the creative reinterpretation of mythic-ethnic symbols while safeguarding against cultural dilution.

2.**Hu Wuyi**'s "Original Creativity in Cultural and Creative Industries: A Case Study of Six Cultural Practitioners in Taipe，Chinai and Shanghai，China" [Fudan University, 2009)]adopts a praxis-oriented approach to dissect the genesis of cultural originality in China's creative sector. Through comparative ethnography of artisans in Taipei，China，(hypothetical placeholder; original text unspecified) and Shanghai，China, Hu maps how grassroots creativity evolves into industrial ecosystems, emphasizing the interplayof socio-institutional frameworks, managerial practices, and localized cultural epistemologies.

3. Yang Lihui's "An Ethnographic Study of Contemporary Oral Myths" [in Frontiers in Folk Literature Lecture Series, 2014] revitalizes the discourse on mythic orality. Yang interrogates oral myths as living socio-cultural texts, tracing their adaptive survival through modernization. Her fieldwork reveals how oral narratives—once vehicles of communal memory—now function as negotiated heritage in urban festivals and digital storytelling platforms, demonstrating myth's fluidity as both tradition and creative commodity.

Mythological Studies and Cultural Historiography:

1.Fu Yanzhi's A Retrospective and Prospective Study on the Publication of Liaozhai Lianhuanhua since 1949 (Shandong University) examines the evolution of Liaozhai myth-themed sequential art (lianhuanhua)—a precursor to modern graphic novels. By periodizing its development into three phases (1950s–1970s, 1980s–1990s, post-2000), Fu analyzes how these illustrated narratives adapted Pu Songling's supernatural tales into visual mythography, reflecting shifting socio-political contexts through publishing trends and consumer reception.

2.Yuan Ke's History of Chinese Mythology systematically traces mythic narratives from prehistoric totemism to Daoist immortals, establishing a canonical framework for analyzing mythic "aura" as cultural DNA.

3.Gan Chunsong's Chinese Deity Worship and Legends deciphers the interplay between folk beliefs, ritual practices, and mythic archetypes, offering insights into the sacred-profane dialectic inherent in cultural commodification.

Theoretical Foundations in Cultural Industries:

1.Xiang Yong's Introduction to Creative Industries [Peking University Press]provides a structural analysis of China's creative ecosystem, framing mythic IP development as a value chain integrating content mining, symbolic abstraction, and experiential consumption.

2.Li Wuwei's New Perspectives on Creative Industries theorizes "cultural resource capitalization," advocating for mythic semiotic systems to serve as meta-narratives driving cross-sector innovation.

Critical Synthesis。While existing scholarship engages with discrete nodes of mythology, aura, or cultural industries, none holistically addresses their triadic interplay. This study bridges this gap through transdisciplinary triangulation:

Recontextualizing Benjaminian "aura" within mythic IP development cycles;

Mapping value transformation pathways from ritualistic symbols to consumer experiences;Establishing evaluative frameworks to balance cultural authenticity and industrial viability.

By hybridizing methodologies from aesthetic philosophy, cultural economics, and narrative studies, this research constructs an original matrix to reactivate mythic "aura" as both cultural anchor and creative catalyst.

Section 1.3 Research Methodology

This study employs a hybrid methodology combining literature synthesis and data-driven analysis.

1.Literature Synthesis:Core arguments and theoretical frameworks from selected scholarly works are systematically collated, with emphasis on mythic "aura," cultural capital, and creative industry dynamics.Prioritizes Chinese scholarship on mythology (e.g., Yuan Ke, Ye Shuxian) while integrating foundational Western theories (Benjamin, Bourdieu).

2.Data Analysis:Utilizes industry reports, market analytics, and consumer behavior datasets[Tencent Cultural Consumption Index, Douban myth-IP ratings] to map mythic narratives' commercial viability and audience reception. Employs NVivo for qualitative coding of mythic motifs in successfulCultural and Creative Products(e.g., Black Myth: Wukong, Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child).

Section 1.4 Thesis Structure

The thesis unfolds through the following interdisciplinary framework:

1. Benjaminian "Aura" Reconstructed

- Conducts a hermeneutic analysis of Walter Benjamin's "aura" theory, reinterpreting it through the prism of digital mythopoeia. Synthesizes critical debates on aura's dissolution (mechanical reproduction) versus regeneration (participatory worldbuilding in creative industries).

2. Diachronic Mapping of Chinese Mythic Narratives

- Classifies mythic evolution into four paradigms:

- Ritual-Embedded(pre-Qin bronze inscriptions as sacred-political codes)

- Cosmological Bricolage** (Han tomb murals fusing Daoist immortals with bureaucratic afterlife imaginaries)

- Literary Hybridity (Tang-Song *zhiguai* tales as proto-fiction)

- Industrial Reincarnation** (post-2000 transmedia myth-IP ecosystems)

3. Bourdieusian Field Analysis of Mythic Capital

- Traces the transmutation of mythic symbols across **cultural fields:

- Sacred Field*: Shang-Zhou ritual bronzes → Han stone reliefs → Buddhist cave murals

- Secular Field*: Ming-Qing vernacular prints → Republican-era "butterfly" fiction → digital *xianxia* franchises

- Economic Field*: From imperial patronage to algorithm-driven IP valuation models

4. Neo-Auratic Rebirth in Creative Industries

- Proposes Mythic Alchemy Frameworkfor cultural adaptation:

- Extraction: Distilling core archetypes (e.g., Journey to the West's "redemptive pilgrimage")

- Transmutation: Recontextualizing via technological mediation (e.g., Black Myth: Wukong's Unreal Engine 5 hyperrealism)

- Embedding: Weaving adapted narratives into experiential economies (e.g., Dunhuang VR cave tours)

5. Market Dynamics & Case Studies

- Analyzes myth-IP performance metrics across sectors:

- Literature: 34% CAGR for zhiguai-themed web novels (2018–2023)

- Gaming: 62% of top-grossing Chinese RPGs leverage mythic lore (2023 Tencent report)

- Film: Creation of the Gods I (2023) grossing \$400M+ via mythic epic modernized as political allegory

This structure interlaces theoretical rigor with empirical validation, positioning mythic "aura" as a dynamic interface between ancestral wisdom and algorithmic modernity.

While this study centers on the "cultural and creative industries," the expansive scope of its ancillary themes—"aura" and "mythic narratives"—necessitates deliberate scholarly bracketing.

1.Delimiting Mythic Studies

Interdisciplinary Nexus: Acknowledging mythology's intersections with folklore, art history, philosophy, politics, and economics, this research adopts a focused Sinocentric lens, prioritizing seminal Chinese scholars (Yuan Ke, Ye Shuxian) while selectively integrating Western theorists (Campbell, Lévi-Strauss) as heuristic complements.

Conceptual Pragmatism: Bypassing endless debates on myth's ontological definitions, the study operationalizes myth as narrative archetypes with ritual-symbolic residues, filtered through Chinese cultural historiography.

2. Mythic Iconography: A Han-Centric Focus

Primary Corpus: Han Dynasty stone reliefs (huaxiangshi) and brick carvings (huaxiangzhuan) are foregrounded as proto-mythic media, embodying:Ritual-political cosmologies (e.g., Queen Mother of the West iconography)Early narrative sequencing (e.g., filial piety tales in Shandong tomb art)

Supplementary Materials: Ming-Qing vernacular paintings (e.g., Water Margin woodcuts) and contemporary digital myth-art (e.g., Zenless Zone Zero character designs) are selectively referenced to trace continuity.

3. Theoretical Anchoring

Aura: Strictly adheres to Benjamin's Kultwert (cult value) vs. Ausstellungswert (exhibition value) dialectic, resisting postmodern reinterpretations.

Cultural Capital: Applies Bourdieu's field theory to map mythic symbols' transmutation from sacred habitus (Han ritual art) to neoliberal illusio (theme park spectacles).

This methodological bracketing ensures analytical depth within defined epistemological parameters, enabling rigorous interrogation of mythic "aura" as a dynamic interface between ancestral memory and algorithmic modernity.

Chapter 2: The Efficacy of Aura—Manifestation of Mythic Cult Value

Section 2.1 The Genesis of Aura

Within the philosophical canon, Walter Benjamin first conceptualized "Aura" in his 1931 essay Little History of Photography, framing it through the interplay of early photographic technology and human perception. Analyzing a childhood portrait of Franz Kafka (Fig. 1), Benjamin described how light and shadow coalesced into an "aura"—a term rendered as " 灵 氛 " (lingfen) in Chinese translations—that suffused the subject with an atmosphere of solitude and melancholy. He observed:

"The aura emerges at the intersection of time and space—a haze clinging to distant mountains, the dappled shimmer of sunlight through foliage. It is the residue of uniqueness: the shadowed contours of a subject's being, irreproducible in its lived immediacy."[Walter Benjamin, Little History of Photography, in Selected Writings, Vol. 2, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 518]

As photographic technology advanced, practitioners mastered

the nuanced manipulation of light, expanding applications from portraiture to documentary and archival uses. Yet this technical progress paradoxically eroded the "aura," which Benjamin linked to the cultic presence of the unrepeatable moment. Early photographs retained traces of ritualistic solemnity—akin to ancestral tablets or sacred relics—while mechanized reproduction transformed images into exhibition-value commodities, stripped of their spatial-temporal singularity.

For Benjamin, aura's dissolution mirrored modernity's broader disenchantment: the replacement of contemplative immersion with distracted consumption. This dialectic underpins his later elaboration in The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, where aura's decline becomes symptomatic of capitalism's colonization of cultural memory.



Figure 1. Childhood Portrait of Franz Kafka

(Image source: Walter Benjamin, «Little History of Photography,» in Methods of Seeing and Everyday Life, trans. Ni Yang, p. 33.)

In The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Walter Benjamin further explicates "aura" as the aesthetic essence of authenticity (Echtheit) inherent in artworks—a quality forged by their unique spatiotemporal existence and the atmospheric interplay of their surroundings. This "aura," he argues, is constructed through lived experience, imbuing the work with an irreplaceable, quasi-sacred significance that demands ritualistic reverence.

Linguistic Genealogy of "Aura"

The term "aura" originates from the Greek verb αὔω (auō), meaning "to blow" or "to breathe," signifying phenomena such as wind, airflow, and ethereal "breath" (pneuma)[Yang Junjie, Revisiting Benjamin's "Aura", Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2014, p. 23]] . In Xie Daren's Latin-Chinese Dictionary (Commercial Press, 1988, p. 60), the Latin "aura" encompasses:

Natural phenomena: Gentle breezes, vapors, sunlight, celestial radiance.

Cultural semiotics: Ethos (Volksgeist), acoustic reverberations, luminous halos.

Mystical connotations: Sacred halos in Western iconography, symbolizing divine presence [Zhang Yuneng, Reflections on Translating Benjamin's "Aura" into Chinese, Foreign Literature Studies, 2007.5, pp. 151-161].

In German contexts, "aura" carries polysemous meanings:

Religious/Artistic: A "radiant halo enveloping the body," a state of spiritual communion, or the luminous nimbus surrounding sacred figures in Christian art [Zhu Hongju, Unpacking Benjamin's "Aura" in Literary Criticism, Modern Philosophy, No. 1, 2004, p. 124].

Medical: The premonitory "aura" preceding epileptic episodes, metaphorically linked to light as a harbinger of revelation[Yang Junjie, ibid.]

Sinological Interpretations and Semantic Fluidity

Chinese scholars have rendered "aura" variably as 气息 (qi xi, "breath"), 灵韵 (lingyun, "numinous resonance"), 灵光 (lingguang, "numinous radiance"), or 光晕 (guangyun, "luminous halo"), reflecting both the term's etymological roots in "breath" (qi) and "light" (guang), as well as its conceptual ambiguity. This multiplicity arises from Benjamin's deliberate framing of "aura" as a liminal concept straddling sacred aura and secular aesthetics.

Symbolist Underpinnings: The George Circle

The term "aura" gained philosophical traction through the Stefan George Circle, a German Symbolist movement influenced by French l'art pour l'art ("art for art's sake"). Centered on George's journal Blätter für die Kunst (Pages for Art), this school elevated art as a vessel of transcendent beauty. George's poetry collection Hymnen (Hymns/Odes, 1890)—particularly its eighth poem Wandel (Metamorphosis)—exemplifies this ethos through solar mysticism and luminous imagery [Song Qiuguo, A Study of Stefan George's Aesthetic Poetry, Xi'an International Studies University, 2014, p. 2].

Benjamin's "aura" thus inherits this Symbolist legacy, re-

imagining art's sacred luminosity within the dialectics of mechanical reproduction.

From Stefan George's Hymnen (Hymns/Odes), the eighth poem Wandel (Metamorphosis), here is the original German text followed by its English translations:

German Original:

First Stanza:

"Abendlich auf schattenbegleiteten wegen / Über brücken den türmen und mauern entgegen / Wenn leise klänge sich regen: // Auf einem goldenen wagen / Wo perlgraue flügel dich tragen / Und lindenbüsche dich fächeln / Herniedertauche / Mit mildem lächeln / Und linderndem hauche!"

Second Stanza:

"Unter den masten auf rüstig furchendem kiele / Über der wasser und strahlen schimmerndem spiele / In glücklicher ferne vom ziele: // Auf einem silbernen wagen / Wo lichtgrüne spiegel dich tragen / Und schaumgewinde dich fächeln / Herniedertauche / Mit frohem lächeln / Und kosendem hauche!"

Third Stanza:

"Lang ist nach jauchzendem tode die sonne verschollen / Mit den planken die brausenden wogen grollen / Und dumpfe gewitter rollen: // Auf einem stählernen wagen / Wo lavaschollen dich tragen / Und grell lohe wolken dich fächeln / Herniedertauche / Mit wildem lächeln / Und sengendem hauche!"[Stefan George, Hymnen, Pilgerfahrten, Algabal, Gesamt-Ausgabe der Werke, Band 2, Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1928, pp. 27-29]

English Translation:

First Stanza:

"Evening falls on shadowed paths / Over bridges toward towers and walls / As soft melodies stir: // In a golden chariot / Borne by pearl-gray wings / And fanned by linden boughs / Descend / With gentle smiles / And soothing breath!"

Second Stanza:

"Beneath the masts on a sturdy, cleaving keel / Over shimmering waters and radiant play / In blissful distance from the goal: // In a silver chariot / Borne by light-green mirrors / And fanned by foaming waves / Descend / With joyous smiles / And caressing breath!"

Third Stanza:

"Long has the sun been lost after jubilant death / With the planks, the roaring waves churn / And muffled storms roll: // In a steel chariot / Borne by molten lava / And fanned by blazing clouds / Descend / With wild smiles / And scorching breath!"

From the Poem's Imagery, the author employs three chariots of distinct materials—gold, silver, and iron—as symbolic Western motifs to evoke the divine "auras" of a goddess, each representing a celestial light:

Golden Chariot: Symbolizes the dazzling sunlight of day, accompanied by a "soothing breath."

Silver Chariot: Embodies the serene moonlight of night, exuding a "caressing breath."

Iron Chariot: Represents the midnight lightning's electric fury, radiating a "scorching breath." [Yang Hongqin, Ibid., p. 6.]

The recurring motif of "breath" (hauche) aligns with the etymological roots of "aura"—originally signifying "air" or "breath"—while mapping the goddess's tripartite divine manifestations onto temporal and spatial shifts. This progression mirrors humanity's ambivalent relationship with the sacred: a blend of reverent awe and empathetic communion, where the human and divine coalesce through synesthetic harmony. Wolfdietrich Rasch, a scholar within the George Circle, termed this phenomenon the "breath of life" (Lebenshauch), framing aura as a vitalist force bridging mortal and immortal realms [Lin Yinji, The Aura in Water Lilies: A Study of Monet's Late Paintings, China Academy of Art, 2011, p. 16].

Benjamin's Reconfiguration of "Aura"

Zhao Yong, in Integration and Subversion: The Dialectics of Mass Culture [Peking University Press, 2005, pp. 152–160], traces Benjamin's conceptual evolution of "aura":

Pre-Modern Ritual: Aura emerges from artworks embedded in cultic practices (e.g., totemic masks, ancestral tablets).

Renaissance Shift: Aura migrates from religious relics to autonomous art, sacralized through artistic genius.

Mechanical Reproduction: Aura's dissolution under industrial replication, lamented in The Storyteller as narrative traditions yield to fragmented media.

Shock of Modernity: Mass culture's "aestheticization of politics" replaces aura's contemplative depth with tactile distraction.

Scholars emphasize Benjamin's "originality" in redefining "aura" beyond the George Circle's mystical usage. For Benjamin, aura embodies an "unapproachable distance"—a paradoxical intimacy where the artwork, while physically present, remains transcendentally remote. This dialectic manifests when viewers confront an artwork in a museum: the piece exerts a gravitational pull, inviting the observer into a silent dialogue across temporal chasms. In this mutual gaze—the

viewer's contemplation met by the artwork's silent "returned gaze"—aura emerges as a liminal space where subject and object negotiate presence and absence. As Nietzsche famously observed, "When you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you," encapsulating aura's reciprocal haunting.

Key Theoretical Contributions

Aura as Distance: Benjamin's insistence on aura's "cultic remoteness" critiques modernity's erosion of contemplative space.

Synesthetic Communion: The interplay of breath, light, and materiality in George's poetry prefigures Benjamin's multisensory aura.

sDialectical Materialism: Zhao Yong contextualizes aura's decline within capitalist commodification, contrasting Rasch's vitalist interpretation.

This synthesis positions "aura" as a prism refracting art's sacred lineage, industrial alienation, and the enduring human yearning for transcendence.

According to the poem, the author makes a beautiful description of the three "rays of light" of the deity through the symbols of "carts" made of three different materials, namely gold, silver, and iron, which are used to describe the gods in the West. These three "rays of light" respectively represent: the golden cart symbolizes the dazzling sunlight of the day; the silver cart symbolizes the soft and tranquil moonlight of the night; the iron cart symbolizes the lightning light of the rapid current in the late night. At the same time, the poem also corresponds the atmosphere of these three "rays of light" one by one. The sunlight of the day is the "gentle breath", the moonlight at night is the "breath of love", and the thunder at midnight is the "scorching breath".[Ibid., p. 6.] The "breath" that appears in the poem also corresponds exactly to the meaning represented by the word "Aura". By depicting the changes in three different times and spaces within a day, the author corresponds to the three different divine "rays of light" of the goddess. The progressive description of the atmospheric phenomena also expresses people's emotional attitude of connection and worship towards the deity, as well as the synesthetic effect that can be generated when human nature and divinity are reconciled with each other. In the same school, "Wolf Skeel calls this 'ray of light' the 'breath of life'."[Lin Yinji. "The Spirit in the Water Lilies: A Study on Monet's Later Paintings", China Academy of Art, 2011, p. 16.]

In his book "Integration and Subversion: The Dialectics of Popular Culture", Zhao Yong brings up the term "aura" at the beginning of the third subsection in the third chapter when interpreting Benjamin. And in the footnote at the end of the article, he elaborately explains the origin and the original usage of the word "Aura". In the article, the author systematically tells the story of Benjamin's concept of "aura" in chronological order, from the emergence of the function of pre-modern artworks following witchcraft and religious rituals, to the displacement of the aura of artworks in religious theology during the Renaissance period, which entered the field of art theology. Then, it criticizes the disappearance of the aura in the era of industrial reproduction. In "The Storyteller", he expresses regret for the disappearance of his "aura" with the emergence of "storytelling" along with the appearance of news and novels, and also gives an explanation for the appearance of the "shock" of mass consumption. [Zhao Yong. "Integration and Subversion: The Dialectics of Popular Culture", Beijing: Peking University Press, June 2005, pp. 152-160.]

The reason why scholars say that Benjamin's application of the concept of "aura" is of an "original" nature is mainly because, on the basis of the Georgians' application of the term "ray of light", Benjamin continuously endows this word with newer and richer connotations and meanings.[Ibid., p. 190.] In the definition of Benjamin's philosophy, "aura" is a distance that cannot be reached in both spatial and temporal dimensions, yet it has an invisible interaction with your whole body, absorbing and caring for each other. It can seem very close, but it is actually an unreachable artistic conception. For example, when people admire a famous painting or a statue in an art gallery, they will develop a feeling of looking up across the torrent of time and space towards the work and the artist. Standing still to appreciate it, they will feel the gravitational force emanating from the artwork at that moment. Thus, the audience will naturally generate associative perceptions that flood into their memories during the process of viewing, in relation to the environment. That is to say, when the artwork and the viewer are in the same field, people acknowledge the self-existence of the object. When they gaze at it until they forget themselves, they will get the "look back" from the other side. In other words, during the process of viewing, there is a distance between the subject on the "this shore" and the object on the "other shore" that the subject's consciousness has reached. In this distance, the two are in a process of mutual gazing and will receive feedback from each other. At this moment, in the space, an atmosphere and tone related to the "aura" will be created. This is roughly the same as the feeling generated by Nietzsche's famous saying: "When you gaze into the abyss, the abyss also gazes into you."

Along with the birth of things in the world that possess the power of "gazing" and establish a relationship with people, apart from the ancient religious icon sculptures and painting art, there are also mythological legends that emerged almost simultaneously with people's initial exploration and understanding of the world and nature. In "A Brief History of Chinese Fiction", Lu Xun explains the origin of myths in this way: "In ancient times, the primitive people saw that all things in heaven and earth were constantly changing, and many of these phenomena were beyond the reach of human power. Therefore, they created various theories to explain them. What they explained is what we call myths today." [Lu Xun. A Brief History of Chinese Fiction", Shanghai An-

cient Books Publishing House, July 2001. (5), p. 8]When the primitive people worshipped and sacrificed to the so-called "gods" in nature that possessed "unknowable power", after the appearance of written language following the translation of images, the "stories" about these gods were passed down orally and combined with the chanting of poems, spreading and developing continuously. These stories then began to condense into an intangible collective common consciousness and belief, thus uniting the primitive people into a tribe, a village, a city-state, or even a country. Although these stories are no longer passed down through oral narration nowadays, they still connect the common beliefs of everyone through the invisible vibrations of the "aura" emanating from them. From the moment of their emergence, myths, just like artworks, have possessed the "aura" worthy of being worshipped.

The development of mythology in China is not as systematic as that in the West. Chinese myths are generally scattered among different historical ancient books and records. This is probably because mythology in China has undergone a process of historization. Within the scope of narrow mythological studies, there has been no mythology after the historization process. However, from a broad perspective, the development and evolution of Chinese mythology mainly went through four important periods: First, it was the mythological era during the period of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors when the "heroes" were deified under the worship of nature. The main content of these myths were stories such as the creation of the world, moving mountains, and chasing the sun. Next, during the Wei and Jin dynasties, in a realm where cultural thoughts and beliefs were slightly permeated but mostly in conflict and not much related to each other, the strange tales about immortals, witches, and ghosts gradually shifted towards politics, philosophy, and even morality. Examples include Records of the Search for the Supernatural [Gan Bao (Jin Dynasty， from ,265 AD to 420 AD).[Records of the Search for the Supernatural, translated by Wang Shaoying, Zhonghua Book Company, 1979] Records of Natural History [Zhang Hua (Jin Dynasty， from 265 AD to 420 AD). A Complete Translation of Records of Natural History, annotated and translated by Zhu Hongjie, Guizhou People's Publishing House, December 1992 (First Edition)], Biographies of Immortals Ge Hong (Jin Dynasty,). Collation and Annotation of Biographies of Immortals, collated and annotated by Hu Shouwei, Zhonghua Book Company Publishing House, September 2010], etc. Then, during the Song Dynasty（from 960 AD to 1279 AD）, with the beginning of the integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism and the establishment of a common belief in the secular world, there emerged documentary biographies mainly focusing on integration and compilation, such as Extensive Records of the Taiping Era [Li Fang and others (Song Dynasty,). Extensive Records of the Taiping Era]. Finally, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, there were 神魔小说 (novels about gods and demons) with religious implications, such as the well-known mythological stories like Journey to the West*, Investiture of the Gods, The Female Immortal Historian, Lü Dongbin's Dream of Immortal Ascension through the Peach and Willow, etc.

The formal citation of the term "myth" and the initiation of relatively systematic discussions on it began to rise in the early 20th century, which was also the period when the research on the "mythological revival" in Europe reached its peak. A strong upsurge of mythology studies spread eastward to Asia. [He Xuejun. "A Century of Chinese Mythology Studies", published in Social Science Research, 2000.5, p. 135.] The studies of mythology in China were influenced partly directly by the West and partly by Japan. At the beginning of this century, domestic scholars such as Lu Xun, Gu Jiegang, Mao Dun, and Liang Qichao, who were among the first to introduce "mythology" into literature as a part of academic research on traditional Chinese culture, all made contributions from the perspective of "mythology" to opening up new horizons and new fields for the study of Chinese literature, national culture, and cultural thoughts. The word "myth" originally came from the ancient Greek word "mythos", which meant "legends of gods and heroes". In the 19th century, it could be found in the entry describing "myth (fictitious stories, extraordinary people and events)" in Williams' compiled book Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society . Before that, the word "myth" merely meant "fable" or had some negative connotations with a satirical sense (however, in ancient Greece, the word "mythos" also once represented positive meanings such as "sacred stories"). Later, it was introduced into China indirectly through Japanese by Chinese scholars who studied in Japan in the early 20th century. After that, based on anthropology, Mao Dun began to conduct the first specialized and systematic research work on it, namely Studies on Chinese Mythology . Regarding the interpretation of "myth", C.S. Burne, the president of the Folklore Society in the UK in the 20th century, described myth in the Handbook Of Folklore as a "story of origin" with blurred semantic boundaries, used to explain the relationship between the phenomena involving gods, humans, and objects in the world. White people simply classified myths into stories about the deeds of real heroes and folk stories (Marchen), while for indigenous people, myths were only divided into two types: "blasphemous" and "sacred", playing a role of sacred worship in their settlements. The feelings of "reverence" and "sacredness" towards this mysterious story narration were the criteria for judging myths. In the book *Folklore* written by Lin Huixiang, his definition was adopted and summarized, with some minor adjustments made in the details. It was summarized and explained as the concept that although the story was strange and did not conform to the common sense of the human world, it was deeply believed by the people. The term "divine nature" cited by Lu Xun in A Brief History of Chinese Fiction also indicates that "myths mainly revolve around the stories of gods", making people feel revered and admired, thus leading to the establishment of temples and altars for praise and worship, making these stories events that are commonly believed in. In terms of the schools of mythological research, they are

mainly divided into several categories:

The first category is the “Theory of Linguistic Pathology” proposed by the philologist Max Muller and the philosopher Herbert Spencer. In the process of the development of human language, people’s descriptions of things have gradually evolved from having the original function of simply expressing subjective perceptions to being able to convey phenomena through intentional or abstract statements. That is to say, myths stem from the ambiguity caused by the inherent weaknesses of language when people name certain external objects. In other words, the phenomenon of “homologous and similar words” in language indication is the root of all myths. [Ernst Cassirer. Language and Myth, translated by Yu Xiao et al., Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, June 1998, pp. 31 - 33.] For example, the word “Daphne” in Greek mythology originates from the Sanskrit word “Aphanâ”, which means “the red glow of dawn”. Therefore, the myth of Apollo, the sun god, chasing Daphne and turning her into a laurel tree (the Greek word “Δάφνη” means “dawn” in Sanskrit), from the perspective of natural phenomena, represents the trajectory of the sun’s movement in the sky within a day. It follows the sunset glow at dusk, passes through the night, and then the dawn appears with the glow in the sky. Therefore, Muller believed that “myths are the shadows that are not expressed in language.” They are the potential forces exerted on human thinking. However, since this theory only takes a single cultural perspective and uses only natural phenomena as the theme of myths, its perspective and scope are too narrow and one-sided. As a result, it was criticized by the British anthropological school mythologist Andrew Lang and gradually faded into obscurity later on.

The second category is the naturalist school, which holds that myths emerged because humans were initially unable to resist natural forces, leading to the emergence of nature worship.

The third category is the ritualist school, which holds that myths are derivative explanatory texts emerging alongside religious and magical rituals, represented by James Frazer, author of The Golden Bough. In his book, Frazer argues through accounts of ancient Roman mythical practices and primitive beliefs that primitive people practiced “sympathetic magic” composed of two principles: “contagion” (contact magic, where two objects continue to affect each other even after separation) and “similarity” (imitative or homeopathic magic, where similar causes produce similar effects). This form of magic preceded the emergence of religion and constitutes the essence of myth. [Frazer, J. G. The Golden Bough, translated by Xu Yuxin et al., Beijing: Popular Literature and Art Publishing House, January 1998, pp. 19 - 20] The conceptual relationship is illustrated in Figure 2.

The fourth category is the functionalist school of mythology, which posits that myths not only serve as narrative stories but also exert practical social functions, influencing aspects of human life such as magical rituals, cultural beliefs, and social

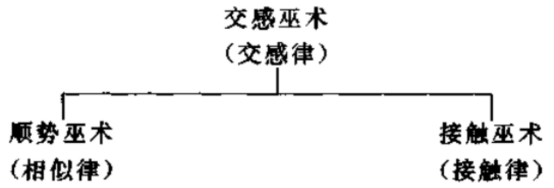


Figure 2. Classification of Magic

(Image source: J. G. Frazer,The Golden Bough, translated by Xu Yuxin et al., Beijing: Popular Literature and Art Publishing House, January 1998, p. 21.)

institutions. Myths act as tools to maintain tribal continuity and guide behavioral norms. The fifth category is the well-known psychological school, represented by psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Freud used the Oedipus myth to illustrate the division of human consciousness into conscious and unconscious realms. The unconscious, like the submerged bulk of an iceberg, contains repressed instincts that erupt under external stimuli—with myths being one such catalyst. Jung expanded this theory into the concept of "collective unconsciousness," elevating it to a shared cultural memory of nations or ethnic groups, manifested through myths. The sixth category is the deconstructionist school, primarily represented by Lévi-Strauss’ analysis of myths using binary opposition, followed by the geographical school, which categorizes myths by regional divisions. As evident from the above, myths reflect primitive peoples’ early cosmologies. As Mao Dun noted in *Studies on Chinese Mythology*, myths emerged from primitive imagination while fulfilling crucial cultural functions in organizing their lives. As the "aura" of primal perceptions of the natural world, myths embody humanity’s earliest cognitive frameworks. Building on Andrew Lang’s theories in Myth, Ritual, and Religion, Mao Dun summarized six characteristics of myths: 1. Animism 2. Superstitious beliefs in magical transformations 3. Belief in postmortem souls dwelling in underworlds as life continuations 4. Belief in ghosts attaching to objects and souls shapeshifting freely 5. Minority beliefs in potential immortality cut short by betrayal 6. Explanations of natural phenomena encountered in dreams The origin of myths lies in primitive peoples’ perception of the "aura" emanating from the natural world—a concept Benjamin viewed as the most authentic language of nature.

Rooted in primal psychological impulses sparked by imagination, myths emerged "against a backdrop of exalted mystical thinking"[Liu Yuqing, Three Major Transformations of Chinese Mythology, Literary and Artistic Studies, 2014.10, p.43] . This cognitive momentum established mythic belief systems, laying groundwork for totemic worship and spawning subsequent cultural, artistic, and ideological developments.

Section 2.2 The Cultural Orientation of Myth

As the "aura" of myths spreads through oral narratives, it generates a multiplicative effect of belief. According to ritualist school studies, myths emerge alongside magical rituals in collective ceremonial contexts. Within these rituals, participants' perceptions and behaviors converge under the influence of environmental atmosphere, forming a gestalt (完形) structure—a holistic framework where the external environment becomes a transparent, integrated scenario field that encompasses the participants. Through this interactive structuration process, human biological rhythms and physical order merge into a unified spiritual field. [Zhang Yaojun. The Metaphorical Body, Hangzhou: China Academy of Art Press, July 2006, p. 15.] In such scenarios, the intense atmosphere created by shared emotions triggers what French sociologist Émile Durkheim termed "collective effervescence." Through shared experiences, participants resonate and establish collective memory, giving rise to a "worship effect."[Xiang Yong. Introduction to Cultural Industries, Beijing: Peking University Press, February 2015, p. 189.]] This shared experience is then transcribed into myths.

Myths have always been embedded in human life. Starting from early totemism, as a source of tribal faith, myth consumption in this period was primarily tied to spiritual solace and experiential construction. Take, for example, the world-famous Göbekli Tepe (Figure 2.1), discovered in 1994 and built around 2500 BCE by hunter-gatherers. Its stone pillars are carved with fierce animals and figures engaged in rituals, centered around a temple structure—clear evidence of its use for religious ceremonies. Constructing this massive complex required collaboration among multiple tribes, united by shared beliefs or religious convictions. Nearby, in the Karacadağ Mountains, scholars have found the origins of domesticated wheat, likely cultivated to sustain temple activities. [Yuval Harari. Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind, translated by Lin Junhong, Beijing: CITIC Press, February 2017, p. 87.] Gradually, villages emerged around the site. This demonstrates that shared beliefs are the cornerstone of collective cohesion.

Myth, as a form of belief consciousness, also represents the

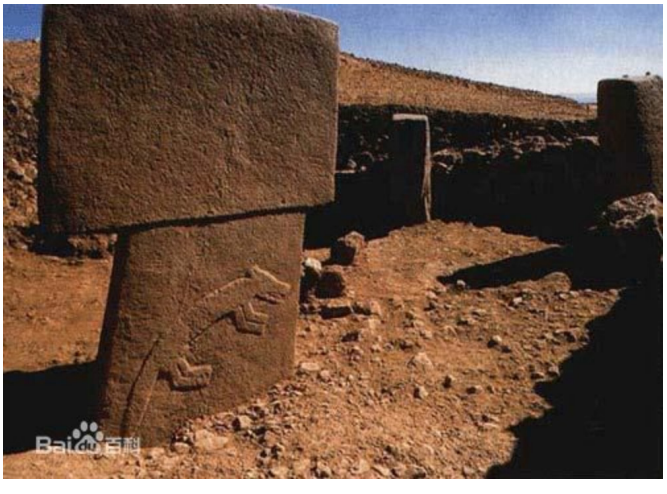




Figure 2.1. Göbekli Tepe

(Image source: Baidu Baike [.Baidu Baike:

https://baike.baidu.com/pic/%E5%93%A5%E8%B4%9D%E5%85%8B%E5%8A%9B%E9%81%97%E5%9D%80/2486026/0/fcbbb1519d39baae8d54302d?fr=lemma&ct=single#aid=0&pic=8c1001e93901213f30918e9554e736d12e2e95dd])

distance between consciousness and cognitive experience as defined by Benjamin when he elaborated on the concept of "aura". Within this distance, "language" serves as the connecting medium. Whether it is the transcendental language of symbols with referential meanings or written characters, it plays the role of "translation", conveying the spirit and thus enabling people to achieve experiential cognition. However, this process of cognition, which leans towards subjective consciousness and neglects the intuitive perception of objective reality, causes the "translation" to make the meanings of the two aspects approach each other in the process, but it also leads to deviations in the internal components of things that "cannot be expressed solely at the level of language". This results in the formation of illusory "fancies" and "dreams" in the judgment of relationships, dominated by self-consciousness. Even the myths generated from these fantasies will exhibit more or less differences. At the same time, precisely because of this, it gives birth to the unique cultural temperament

and spiritual qualities of a particular nation. This is similar to the differences in the implications and cultural meanings between Chinese and Western myths. The reason for the "different paths" of the myths of the two sides lies in the fundamental differences in their initial development sources. The origin of Chinese myths is in the ethnic regions of the Pre-Qin Dynasty, while ancient Greece is the source of Western myths. In the article "The Connotations of Chinese and Western Myths and Their Cultural Traditions", Wang Yi compares the punishments received by the gods for their dereliction of duty in the myths of Pufu and Talos to explain the differences in the concepts of the "relationship between humans and gods". [Wang Yi. "The Connotations of Chinese and Western Myths and Their Cultural Traditions", published in *Cultural Perspective*, p. 23.] [Wang Yi. "The Connotations of Chinese and Western Myths and Their Cultural Traditions", published in *Cultural Perspective*, p. 23.]In terms of concepts, the depiction of the cruelty of Pufu's punishment in ancient Chinese myths is based on the concept of "humiliation" in the presence of onlookers, which mostly comes from mental torture. This is also the result of the unified combination of the national aesthetics, morality, and values in the collective spirit of China. It also reflects that Chinese ideological concepts provide a macroscopic care for the individual, starting from the harmonious collective of the people. In contrast, in the West, punishment is imposed on the body, directly inflicting sensory pain as a form of discipline. Thus, in Western myths, it reflects the independent self-consciousness of the individual and the cultural connotations of intuitiveness and rationality. There are also differences in the descriptions of the images of the gods between China and the West. For example, the descriptions of the gods in Chinese ancient books mostly depict them as having a form that combines human and animal features. For instance, in the "Classic of the Western Mountains" in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the god Luwu of the Kunlun Mountains is described as "having the body of a tiger with nine tails, a human face and tiger claws". The Queen Mother of the West is described as "having a leopard's tail, tiger's teeth, being good at howling, with disheveled hair and wearing a headdress". In addition, in *Li Sao: Questions to Heaven* in *The Songs of Chu* and *Supplementary Records of the Grand Historian*, Nuwa and Fuxi are described as having the head of a human and the body of a snake, and other various myths have similar descriptions of the images. From the above, it can be seen that in ancient China, there was no definite aesthetic consciousness regarding the external features of the "gods". However, the descriptions of the gods in ancient Greek myths are exactly the opposite. They praise the appearance of the gods, endowing the gods with human images, and the gods have strong and plump physical appearances, as well as emotional perceptions of love, hate, anger, and infatuation similar to those of humans, and a worldly atmosphere. Through comparison, it can be seen that in terms of spiritual culture, what Chinese and Western myths reflect respectively is that the ancient Chinese descriptions of the gods pay more attention to the development and manifestation of spiritual qualities rather than physical appearances. The characteristics of the gods depicted in Chinese myths often endow human "heroes" with the divine nature, having the qualities of putting the public interest first, eliminating selfish desires, punishing evil and promoting good, and loving the people collectively. For example, in the myths such as "Yu the Great tamed the floods and passed by his home three times without entering", "Shennong tasted a hundred herbs", and "Hou Yi shot down the suns". This is different from the Western culture, which personifies the gods, endows them with human beauty, and values the independent thoughts of the individual. [Ibid., pp. 21-24.] For example, in stories like Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, being indifferent to her duties due to the loss of her daughter, and the three goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite arguing endlessly over their beauty, people endow the "gods" with their own emotional aspects and emphasize the value of the individual. During the Middle Ages, the prosperity of Western theology immersed art and aesthetics in it, adding a layer of idealistic mystery to art. However, no matter how much emotional experience is applied in space, resulting in widely varying temperaments and atmospheres, myths have always been an indispensable part of both Eastern and Western cultures, existing in the daily lives and even consumption activities of the public. As an integral part of culture, when people construct myths, they are also consuming myths, but the patterns presented are different in different eras. In modern times, consumption is inevitably a term closely associated with economic and commodity exchange behaviors. But at the same time, it also refers to the autonomous activity of consciously consuming and using a certain object. It can be said that in order to satisfy their inner desires, people are constantly "consuming" the things around them. This is a spontaneous and innate instinct that cannot be suppressed. From the air we breathe and the food we eat to the culture that satisfies our spirit, it is undoubtedly all a process of consumption. Similarly, in ancient times, people's "consumption" of myths mostly came from the worship of beliefs and gods, which is also a manifestation of the "worship value" of myths. This manifestation is reflected in everything from the mural images painted in palaces, temples, folk houses, Buddhist temples, Taoist temples, and grotto tombs, to the use of statues of immortals and Buddhist figures and folk belief artworks. All these are manifestations of people's application of myths through "image symbols". The story content in myths is expressed as symbols. And symbols are expressions of meaning. Through the presentation of images, they are present in a certain context, enabling the people who worship to feel the sacred atmosphere that is released from the symbols and contains a sense of distant respect and lingers around them, thus generating a sense of reverence and enabling the worship value of myths to be effectively exerted. And this defined atmosphere hovering around people, when they absorb and feel it, is the manifestation of the "aura". From the perspective of the aura described by Benjamin, it is

something that can flow into space and be felt through one's own experience, combining the natural and the physical. When people are aware of the presence of the aura, they will "absorb the spiritual energy into their own situational feelings (Befindlichkeit), and the uncertain feeling qualities (Gefühlsqualität) that flow into the perceived space" [Gernot Böhme, *Atmospheric Aesthetics*, translated by Jia Hongyu. China Social Sciences Press, April 2018, p. 36.]as the generation of the atmosphere. And when people come into contact with the objective representations of myths, the qualities they feel are the spiritual perceptions triggered by the "aura" and the "needs" obtained through the "consumption" of myths. Take, for example, the murals in the Han Dynasty tombs depicting the divine beings and immortal beasts in the celestial realm in myths, as well as the remaining painted bricks and stone reliefs. The murals found on the ceiling of the Bu Qianqiu tomb in Luoyang, Henan Province, China (Figure 3) depict a group of continuous and imaginative horizontal long scenes. From the perspective of the picture, as marked by the serial numbers from right to left and from top to bottom (in the order from the inside to the outside of the flat ridge of the tomb ceiling), the images painted in sequence are all patterns of immortals and cloud beasts that appear in mythological legends. There are yellow snakes, the Golden Crow and the sun disc, Fuxi with a human head and a snake body, the tomb owner and his wife riding on a dragon and a phoenix, the Jade Rabbit, immortals, the White Tiger, the Vermilion Bird, Feilian, the Azure Dragon, the feathered man holding a scepter, the toad and the moon disc, Nuwa, and the curling and flowing cloud patterns painted around. [Huang Peixian. "On the Functions of the Murals in the Han Dynasty Tombs", published in *Studies on the Art of Ancient Tombs*, Volume 1. Cultural Relics Press, Beijing, 2011, p. 42.] These elements together form a vivid story scene of the tomb owner ascending to the celestial realm after death. In addition to playing a decorative role for the tomb, it also vividly conveys the Han people's imagination of the celestial realm, their attitudes towards the cosmic world, the relationship between humans and gods, and the concept of yin and yang, as well as other deeper symbolic meanings.

Myth, as a form of belief consciousness, also represents the distance between consciousness and cognitive experience as defined by Benjamin when he elaborated on the concept of "aura". Within this distance, "language" serves as the connecting medium. Whether it is the transcendental language of symbols with referential meanings or written characters, it plays the role of "translation", conveying the spirit and thus enabling people to achieve experiential cognition. However, this process of cognition, which leans towards subjective consciousness and neglects the intuitive perception of objective reality, causes the "translation" to make the meanings of the two aspects approach each other in the process, but it also leads to deviations in the internal components of things that "cannot be expressed solely at the level of language". This results in the formation of illusory "fancies" and "dreams" in the judgment of relationships, dominated by self-consciousness. Even the myths generated from these fantasies will exhibit more or less differences. At the same time, precisely because of this, it gives birth to the unique cultural temperament and spiritual qualities of a particular nation. This is similar to the differences in the implications and cultural meanings between Chinese and Western myths. The reason for the "different paths" of the myths of the two sides lies in the fundamental differences in their initial development sources. The origin of Chinese myths is in the ethnic regions of the Pre-Qin Dynasty, while ancient Greece is the source of Western myths. In the article "The Connotations of Chinese and Western Myths and Their Cultural Traditions", Wang Yi compares the punishments received by the gods for their dereliction of duty in the myths of Pufu and Talos to explain the differences in the concepts of the "relationship between humans and gods". [Wang Yi. "The Connotations of Chinese and Western Myths and Their Cultural Traditions", published in *Cultural Perspective*, p. 23.] In terms of concepts, the depiction of the cruelty of Pufu's punishment in ancient Chinese myths is based on the concept of "humiliation" in the presence of onlookers, which mostly comes from mental torture. This is also the result of the unified combination of the national aesthetics, morality, and values in the collective spirit of China. It also reflects that Chinese ideological concepts provide a macroscopic care for the individual, starting from the harmonious collective of the people. In contrast, in the West, punishment is imposed on the body, directly inflicting sensory pain as a form of discipline. Thus, in Western myths, it reflects the independent self-consciousness of the individual and the cultural connotations of intuitiveness and rationality. There are also differences in the descriptions of the images of the gods between China and the West. For example, the descriptions of the gods in Chinese ancient books mostly depict them as having a form that combines human and animal features. For instance, in the "Classic of the Western Mountains" in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the god Luwu of the Kunlun Mountains is described as "having the body of a tiger with nine tails, a human face and tiger claws". The Queen Mother of the West is described as "having a leopard's tail, tiger's teeth, being good at howling, with disheveled hair and wearing a headdress". In addition, in *Li Sao: Questions to Heaven* in *The Songs of Chu* and *Supplementary Records of the Grand Historian*, Nuwa and Fuxi are described as having the head of a human and the body of a snake, and other various myths have similar descriptions of the images. From the above, it can be seen that in ancient China, there was no definite aesthetic consciousness regarding the external features of the "gods". However, the descriptions of the gods in ancient Greek myths are exactly the opposite. They praise the appearance of the gods, endowing the gods with human images, and the gods have strong and plump physical appearances, as well as emotional perceptions of love, hate, anger, and infatuation similar to those of humans, and a worldly atmosphere. Through comparison, it can be seen that in terms of spiritual

culture, what Chinese and Western myths reflect respectively is that the ancient Chinese descriptions of the gods pay more attention to the development and manifestation of spiritual qualities rather than physical appearances. The characteristics of the gods depicted in Chinese myths often endow human "heroes" with the divine nature, having the qualities of putting the public interest first, eliminating selfish desires, punishing evil and promoting good, and loving the people collectively. For example, in the myths such as "Yu the Great tamed the floods and passed by his home three times without entering", "Shennong tasted a hundred herbs", and "Hou Yi shot down the suns". This is different from the Western culture, which personifies the gods, endows them with human beauty, and values the independent thoughts of the individual. 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In addition to playing a decorative role for the tomb, it also vividly conveys the Han people's imagination of the celestial realm, their attitudes towards the cosmic world, the relationship between humans and gods, and the concept of yin and yang, as well as other deeper

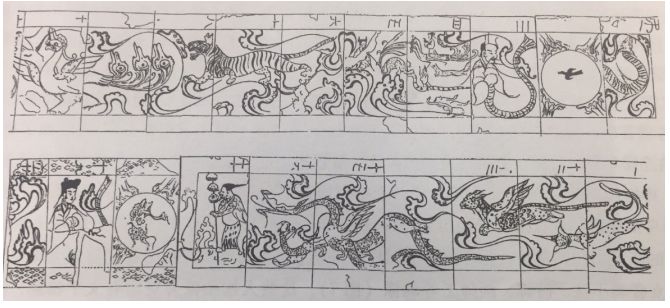


Figure 3. Line Drawing of the Ceiling Mural in the Bu Qianqiu Tomb in Luoyang, Henan Province, China

(Image source: Huang Peixian. «On the Functions of the Murals in Han Dynasty Tombs,» published in *Studies on the Art of Ancient Tombs*, Volume 1, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 2011, p. 42.)

symbolic meanings.

The images of the main yin-yang deities in the tomb, who hold aloft the sun and moon discs while encircled by swirling clouds, establish a clear, orderly structure for the Han people's celestial cosmology—despite their flat, planar composition. The spiraling cloud motifs, four directional spirit beasts intertwined with dragon patterns symbolizing spatial orientation, and ethereal feathered immortals vividly reflect Han reverence for life's endurance and their longing for the joyous, illusory atmosphere of the divine realm. This also embodies the Han philosophical principle inscribed in these artworks: "Harmonizing yin-yang, emulating heaven-earth, transforming all things, governing mortal existence" [[He Xilin. "An Examination of the Main Yin-Yang Deities in Han Dynasty Paintings," in the same volume as cited earlier, p. 127][He Xilin. "An Examination of the Main Yin-Yang Deities in Han Dynasty Paintings," in the same volume as cited earlier, p. 127]].

Though primarily intended for the deceased tomb occupant, the murals' integration into the tomb's spatial container inherently constructs a fantasy of celestial transcendence. When archaeologists later unearthed these buried artworks and displayed them in museums, their cultural aura traverses temporal and spatial barriers to engage viewers in silent dialogue. Each observer, shaped by personal perspective, encounters a unique "realm": "Realms born from varied hearts are neither past nor present, yet surpass mundane reality. Thus, mountains and rivers reveal their spirituality through me, their voice channeled by my consciousness" [[Wang Guowei. Remarks on Ci Poetry in the Human World, Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore, March 2013, p. 13]]. As subjective perception molds the scene, Benjamin's "aura" materializes instantaneously—a testament to myth's enduring power to bridge epochs.

Section 2.3 Value Embodiment and Application of Myth in Artworks

Naturally, apart from mural images, when various carriers with religious beliefs, such as statues, New Year paintings, and other media, are placed on the display shelves in museums or other venues as artworks, their inherent sacredness related to religious beliefs at the beginning, the authenticity closely associated with the creators and the era, and the untouchable distance maintained between them and the viewers start to expand and extend into the external space and society with the transformation of space, time, and even the viewing attitude. When the functional objects with the nature of "myths" gradually lose their original practical functions for which they were created and detach from their sacrificial or ritual functions, evolving into pure artworks, the aesthetic judgment made by the viewers at this moment makes their aesthetic value more obvious than their original worship value. The "myths" embedded in the artworks more or less satisfy people's spiritual or material needs. Although they have become objects for pure appreciation after hundreds or thousands of years, the mist of history and traces surrounding them over time still enables those who stop to admire them to experience a certain inapproachable spiritual atmosphere, evoking feelings of awe and admiration. At this moment, the "beauty" in artworks begins to separate and become independent from the practical application of religion. During the Western Renaissance, humanism was carried forward, and human individuality was liberated. Art started to be associated with the upper class and also became a way to improve people's self-cultivation. Later, artists were labeled with words like "genius," "creation," and "talent," and were recognized by people. Thus, they were no longer just the "makers" of artworks. In Plato's view, the "inspiration" of artists is that after a person's death, the soul ascends to the sky, receives the care of the divine realm, and then attaches to the body again, carrying "recollections," that is, the attachment of the "recollections of the soul," which has a mysterious nature inherited from Greek myths. However, Hegel broke this mysterious color and regarded inspiration from a dialectical perspective. He believed that inspiration is a comprehensive entity bred by the integration of the external objective reality and the unconsciousness of one's own emotional sensibility. With the continuous definition of the word "inspiration," the attribution of these terms to artists, and the "independence" of art, artworks began to gradually detach from daily life and create a gap with the common people. Therefore, art is no longer just a matter of subjective intention but has become an object of judgment and aesthetic appreciation for people. American anthropologist Robert Redfield, based on the hierarchical structure of human civilization with the "wise elite and the ignorant common people," divided culture into the "great tradition" that can be written and mastered by the upper class and the educated, and the "little tradition" that is orally passed down in lower-level towns and villages .[Ye Shuxian. "The Great Tradition and the Little Tradition of Chinese Culture," Guangming Daily, August 3, 2012, Page 15]This also corresponds to the highbrow and lowbrow cultures, the refined and the popular cultures. At this time, art gradually takes on the tone of "elite culture." But at the same time, the sacrificial utensils that have been transformed into artworks step down from the altar, and their functions and values change. Artists begin to infuse their own intended consciousness into artworks, completing emotional participation, and the audience also gains their own experiences through viewing the works .[Gernot Böhme. *Atmospheric Aesthetics*, translated by Jia Hongyu. China Social Sciences Press, April 2018, pp. 55–57] Through the communication of artworks and the presence of the viewers, they can feel the aura in art.

Although art is no longer related to the "worship value" associated with religious beliefs, it has stepped onto the ladder of "aesthetic value," possessing its unique authenticity and irreplaceability. At this time, the aura attached to the artworks has not disappeared yet, but it has shifted from the

perspective of "sacredness" to the stance of being appreciated and viewed. Therefore, on the ladder of art's trend towards aesthetic functions, myths are reconstructed and become a way for people to understand the world, experience common experiences, and comprehend their own meanings. Just as Clive Bell said, they are "significant forms" that can stimulate people's aesthetic emotions and are higher than daily life. Art with an aura is Benjamin's judgment on the aesthetic value of classical art in the pre-capitalist era. Before the era of mechanical reproduction technology, the "aura" contained in original classic artworks is a metaphor that can be intuitively felt without interpretation when one holds one's breath and concentrates; it is what Chinese classical aesthetics calls "qiyun" (the rhythm of vitality); it is the "theory of stillness and emptiness" in the thoughts of Laozi and Zhuangzi; and it is also the artistic conception in the words written by Xin Qiji of the Southern Song Dynasty, "I find the green mountains most charming, and I expect the green mountains to see me in the same way." The aura "establishes the connection between things that are far apart physically" [Hannah Arendt (ed.). *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections by Walter Benjamin*, translated by Zhang Xudong. SDX Joint Publishing Company, September 2008, p. 33], and it is "a way to poetically present the unity of the world" [Ibid.]. It makes the invisible things be presented before people's eyes through substitution and become experiences. These classical arts, including drama, music, painting, and other categories, have been passed down and praised by later generations, possessing unique functions and aesthetic characteristics in the society at that time. When the functions of myths are integrated into art, myths become a coexisting entity of substantial cultural value and aesthetic value. People can experience the "spiritual charm and artistic conception" of the works themselves through "contemplation," achieving the state of "grasping the essence and transcending the appearance." This is also similar to the realm of the unity of man and nature. When myths become symbols attached to artworks and are auctioned, or placed in expositions for trading as commodities, and are involved in the economic field and enter the space construction system, the culture of myths takes on a display significance. It is divided into the upper and lower reaches, heading towards the exhibition venues in the world and among the people respectively, becoming a readable industrial trend, which is exactly the manifestation of the industrialization of art. Art thus begins to create a mythical kingdom of consumption. Take the relevant data records of the world art auctions in 2017 as an example: Throughout 2017, the global art auction volume reached 14.9 billion US dollars. Compared with the previous year, the global auction volume increased by 20 percentage points. Moreover, the number of countries participating in the art market increased from 34 to 59 compared with previous years .[Datasource:http://k.sina.com.cn/article_6437475712_17fb415800010051vh.html?cre=techpagepc&mod=f&loc=5&r=9&doct=0&rfunc=100]] And the turnover of the world's top five art markets all showed an upward trend, as shown in Figure 4:

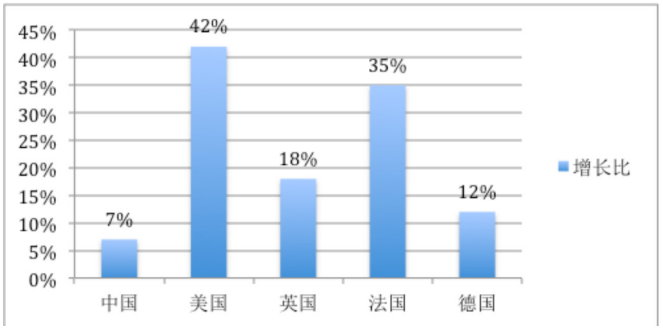


Figure 4. Growth Comparison of Turnovers in the World's Top Five Markets

(Image source: Drawn based on the data from «Looking at Art Auctions from Big Data: A Summary of the Data of the Auction Market in 2017», Sina K [4. Image source: Ibid.])

From the above data, the consumption and auction of artworks are on the rise, indicating that people's desire to access art is growing day by day, and the collection value of artworks has driven the upward growth of market transactions. Walter Benjamin stated: "The world's fairs established the reign of commodities. Grandville's (a French political cartoonist and writer) dreams propagated the character of commodities throughout the universe, modernizing it." [Benjamin, W. *The Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, translated by Zhang Xudong & Wei Wensheng. SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1989, pp. 185–189.]In the space of "world expositions," artworks transform into commodities revered by consumers, fully embodying their exchange value. This shifts the cultural capital embedded in myths into economic capital. Mythic cultural capital exists as an intangible symbolic form, materialized and consumed through symbols. These carriers include artworks, antiques, calligraphy, paintings, and other handicrafts. Their value lies in aesthetic appreciation, collectibility, and investment potential—like the *Venus de Milo* displayed in the Louvre. Originally crafted as a Greek-Roman symbol of love and beauty (Aphrodite), this statue once derived its "aura" from ritualistic veneration. Today, visitors are drawn not by mythic devotion but by the artwork's intrinsic beauty and historical resonance—storied layers of culture and custom preserved over time. Within museum settings steeped in historical atmosphere, viewers experience a paradoxical blend of immediacy and temporal distance. The desire to witness this "aura" and engage in its silent dialogue drives people to purchase museum tickets, transforming mythic cultural value into economic value. Myths evolve from ethereal divine narratives into self-contained "myths" of the artworks themselves. As Jean Baudrillard argued, consumption itself is a myth. Its allure lies in "exploiting change and history—much like how consumption appropriates historical and material realities through symbolic transformations. It offers a phantasm of the world and a quest for 'agitated' happiness within the enclosure of daily life" [Baudrillard, J. *The Consumer Society*, translated by Liu Chengfu & Quan Zhigang. Nanjing

University Press, October 2000, pp. 8–9]. In bustling marketplaces, priced commodities become mythic entities: *"Our shopping malls are our pantheons, our Hells."*[Ibid., p. 7] Here, people consume and venerate. In the realm of commodification, myths adapt—their elements repurposed but never absent. The "aura" of art, once tied to ritual, now manifests as a performative spectacle. Exhibited in curated spaces, its narrative and visual potency expand, luring audiences through consumption while maintaining an untouchable mystique.

Chapter 3 The Dissipation of Aura: Value Transformation of Myth in the "Mechanical-Digital" Reproduction Era

Section 3.1 The Mechanical Reproduction Era: Causes of Aura's Dissipation

Until capitalism, the era of the "mechanical reproduction age" in the industrial society as described by Benjamin was ushered in. In the context where artworks can be mass - produced, their "aura" begins to fade, the immediate and local authenticity no longer exists, and art gradually becomes closer to the public. However, this also means that culture, technology, and industry combine and interact with each other, setting the stage for a new industrial structure. In 1940, the Frankfurt School put forward the concept of "cultural industry" and criticized it, especially targeting American popular culture. They believed that artworks were mass - produced through reproduction technology and became commodities under the catalysis of the market, which actually annihilated individuality. In the mass culture of a commercial society, decorated by the allure of star entertainment and advertising dissemination, those so - called "entertainment industries" and "recreational industries" with unique features and popularity are actually the totalitarianism of advertising violence. This blinds the public with false liberation of individuality, eliminates the individuality of the masses, and makes the entire social ideology more uniform and flat. In the view of Adorno, a representative figure of the Frankfurt School, artworks in the "cultural industry" are all commodities formed by the interweaving of economy and technology, accompanied by the drawbacks of mechanical reproduction. They are "purposeful" cultural innovations and a large - scale, standardized production method.[Yao Wenfang. "Symptomatic Reading of the Frankfurt School's Critique of Mass Culture", Journal of Tsinghua University, April 2016 (Vol. 31), pp. 90 - 91.] Therefore, he strongly criticized the form of cultural consumption in the entire society under the influence of technology, believing that the totality of capitalism is no different from fascism, both of which annihilate different individuals and integrate them into one form. The public is attracted and confused by uniformly packaged commodities or other similarly structured and deliberately arranged social entertainment activities, and then becomes a member of fetishism. They ignore the breakthroughs brought by the technological innovation of the "cultural industry" to the development of contemporary cultural and artistic industries, as well as the positive role played by consumers' participation. They also distinguish "mass culture" from "cultural industry", but it is undeniable that the cultural commodities produced by industrial machinery have led to the transformation from elite culture to mass culture, meeting the public's need for culture and their desire to approach it.[Xiang Yong. Introduction to Cultural Industry, Beijing: Peking University Press, February 2015, p. 145.] In contrast to the extremely negative attitude towards the cultural industry held by Adorno and other members of the school, Benjamin, while criticizing, put forward a different view - that is, he recognized the breakthrough made by technical reproduction in the dissemination of mass culture. He noticed that "the fragmented truths discovered in specific fields present a false appearance through the construction of a supposed causal manner."[Zhu Ningjia. Art and Redemption: A Study of Benjamin's Art Theory, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2009, p. 34.]In this field full of "falsehood", people's demand for and worship of entertainment materials have led to the decline of the "aura" of traditional art. However, he also believed that this is the result of the growing admiration for beauty and the increasingly strong desire of the public to possess and approach "aura - endowed" artworks since the Renaissance. The emergence of mass culture is inseparable from people's strong desire to find the perfect presentation of things around them. Therefore, the redemption of art needs to be explored in the "mechanical reproduction technology" that can be stored in the developed industrial age. The dissipation of the "aura" is because the mechanical reproduction technology enables the mass reproduction of artworks, which, while eliminating their eternal value, also separates them from their ritual functions. People's visual perception has also changed as a result. If a pure counterfeit replicated by hand by the manufacturer is just a copycat behavior of the artwork and happens to achieve the integrity of the original, then mechanical reproduction is that the copy shows the public a new perspective of the original that cannot be seen with the naked eye through the language of replication. At the same time, it takes the original out of the fixed and immovable area and into the circle of people's real life, making the work lose its lofty and inaccessible halo. Since the invention and application of the printing technology of written language marked the starting point of world cultural dissemination, the cultural industry has emerged and developed, promoting the development of the production and printing industries. Electronic imaging and other media products, in the form of new media, have expanded and extended people's five - sense experience

methods, quietly moving the public from the real world to the fantasy world of mass media dominated by the senses, belonging to radio, film, and television. Opera and music that could only be seen in the theater originally can now be enjoyed anytime and anywhere in any restaurant, tavern, or even at home through a phonograph. Stories, poems, or news that only circulated orally or in hand - copied books can now be printed and appear on paper, within everyone's reach.

Taking myths and legends as an example, their most primitive way of transmission in both China and the West is to be spread among the people accompanied by poetry or stored in biographies in historical libraries. However, after the emergence of printing and replication technology, they have been compiled into picture - books and become books and periodicals that can be sold on the market for civilians to read and entertain themselves in their spare time and understand culture. At this time, the sense of sacredness that mythological stories bring in people's minds begins to fade away, and they become popular stories full of magical fantasies in real words on paper, seemingly becoming closer to people's daily lives. This means that the printing and replication technology is quietly changing the way the public accepts things and also starting to change the industrial structure in social and economic life.

Especially since the founding of the People's Republic of China, as a cultural and artistic theme, there are numerous categories of comic books about myths published, which is due to the development of the country's politics and economy, as well as the public's need for visual culture. The following is the statistical table of the publication information of comic books about mythological and supernatural stories in two periods after the founding of the People's Republic of China by Tianjin People's Fine Arts Publishing House (Figure 5). The first period is from the mid - 1950s to the early 1960s, when supernatural comic books initially began to develop. The second period is from the late 1970s to the mid - 1980s. After the end of the "Cultural Revolution", comic books experienced a period of stagnation. After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, they revived in the publishing industry and developed.

From the table above, the print runs of comics in the second period increased by several to dozens of times compared to the first period, yet prices generally dropped significantly. In the first period, the cheapest titles Pigeon Strangeness (《鸽异》) and Painted Wall (《画壁》) were priced above 0.1 yuan, with the highest Chang'e (《嫦娥》) at 0.22 yuan. In the second period, the priciest Yellow Petunia (《黄英》) was only 0.17 yuan, while the cheapest Painted Wall plummeted to 0.08 yuan. The author attributes this fluctuation to three factors:

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Model (Figure 6): Post-social upheaval, China's unstable economy left the public's basic physiological and safety needs unmet, reducing demand for higher-level self-actualization and cultural enrichment.

表一:天津人民美术出版社两个时期聊斋连环画部分重名篇目之比较

篇目	编者		绘者		印数（千册）		价格（元）	
	第一时期	第二时期	第一时期	第二时期	第一时期	第二时期	第一时期	第二时期
宫梦弼	良玉	曹作锐	王胤等	孙昌茵	110.1	651	0.20	0.14
嫦娥	王昌定	白藻	逢真	牛双印	143.1	491	0.22	0.14
鸽异	林彦	林彦	逢真	陈冬至	104.1	580	0.11	0.11
青娥	杨犀	荆予	汪玉山 范志泉	张晓飞	91.1	1341	0.18	0.13
庚娘	王昌定	王君	汤义方	陈惠冠	110.1	600	0.19	0.13
仙人岛	王昌定	王君	张玮	张玮	101.6	1000	0.15	0.10
小谢	小戈	小戈	张令涛 胡若佛	张令涛 胡若佛	80.1	1000	0.20	0.13
细柳	吴廷琯	定兴	逢真	谌孝安 施大畏	108.1	931	0.17	0.11
辛十四娘	林彦	林彦	张令涛 胡若佛	张令涛 胡若佛	110.1	1000	0.19	0.13
黄英	杨淼	杨淼	张锡武	张锡武	110.1	1000	0.17	0.17
翩翩	鹿端	龚家玉	孙信	季源业	95.1	1331	0.15	0.11
神女	冯玉昆	冯玉昆	陈永智	叶永森	100.0	1000	0.18	0.12
素秋	小琴	辛冰	江栋良	陈惠冠 陈都	100.0	971	0.15	0.13
续黄粱	张国贤	张国贤	蒋平	刘锡朋等	70.0	377	0.17	0.12
窦女	王昌定	王君	刘傅业	谢志高	100.0	460	0.16	0.13
画壁	丁元	丁元	黄子希	黄子希	10.0	1000	0.11	0.08
鸦头	林珂	陈元宁	逢真	王丽铭	70.0	932	0.19	0.13

Figure 5. Comparison of Selected Republished Titles of Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio (Liaozhai) Comics by Tianjin People's Fine Arts Publishing House in Two Periods

Market Saturation: Reprinting similar titles in large quantities diminished public interest. As non-essential cultural commodities, comics faced oversupply and marginal effects, leading to price drops. Their non-essential, volatile, and diverse nature, combined with excess supply, eroded pricing power.

Media Disruption: The 1980s cultural renaissance coincided with the rise of radio/TV, shifting visual preferences to moving images. Some comics even reused film stills. Meanwhile, younger audiences embraced Japanese, Korean, Hong Kong, Taiwanese, and Western comics with modern styles, surpassing traditional Chinese comic book. The publishing industry's failure to adapt (e.g., innovation, regulation) and objective factors like rapid media technology advancements further shrank the market[Fu Yanzhi. "Retrospect and Prospect of Liaozhai Comics Publishing Since the Founding of New China," in Documentary Materials, December 10, 2004, p. 125.]

Benjamin took photography and film as examples to explain the turbulent impact of mechanical reproduction on traditional art, as well as the reasons and situations for the renewal and iterative changes of the industry. Through the camera lens, photography technology can capture the details and angles of things that people cannot see or observe with the naked eye. It can also infinitely replicate the same photo, making it lose

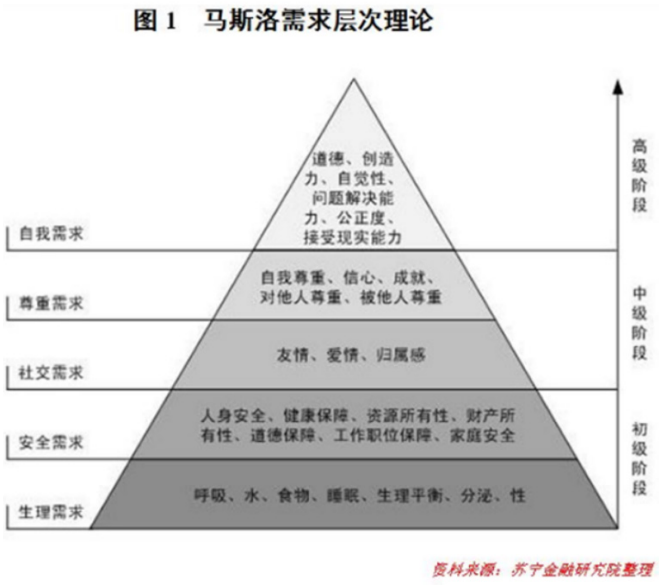


Figure 6. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Model

(Image source: Baidu Images)

[.BaiduImages: http://image.baidu.com/search/detail?ct=503316480&z=0&ipn=d&word=%E9%A9%AC%E6%96%AF%E6%B4%9B%E9%9C%80%E6%B1%82%E6%A8%A1%E5%9E%8B&step_word=&hs=2&pn=41&spn=0&di=51113870171&pi=0&rn=1&tn=baiduimagedetail&is=0%2C0&istype=0&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&in=&cl=2&lm=-1&st=undefined&cs=2160972017%2C4012026681&os=1097248067%2C3683556297&simid=0%2C0&adpicid=0&lpn=0&ln=1851&fr=&fmq=1543569098496_R&fm=&ic=undefined&s=undefined&hd=undefined&latest=undefined&copyright=undefined&se=&sme=&tab=0&width=undefined&height=undefined&face=undefined&ist=&jit=&cg=&oriquery=&objurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.shengshoudanyi.com%2Fuploads%2Fallimg%2F180410%2F1-1P4100U126257.png&gsm=5a&rpstart=0&rpnum=0&islist=&querylist=&selected_tags=0]

the significance of distinguishing "original authenticity". The emergence of film has changed the way the public perceives life. Through dynamic and complex visual sensory stimulation, it has brought the public new aesthetic experiences and ways of "touching" art.

Moreover, regarding film images, the thinker Roland Barthes' theoretical research on "image rhetoric" holds that images are the encoding of language narratives. After World War II, with the development and popularization of communication media, images have become an important medium, playing a dominant role in it. This has enabled mass culture to take root in society and become a new driving force, influencing the public's perception of consumption and brands. Social ideology and symbols are embedded in it. Through the "encoding" and "rhetoric" of images, their timeliness of existence is concealed, thus making them perpetually present. [Wu Qiong, "The Zero Degree of Images: Roland Barthes' Reading of Images", published in *Journal of Renmin University of China*, 2015, Issue 4, p. 3.] Images cover up the "truth" of history in a more natural and lasting form, making the public indulge in a "mythologized" symbol system and reach a state of joy. At this time, myth has shed its outer garment as the content of story narration and has become a set of procedures or a certain way of constructing meaning, becoming the "revelation of past real things", just like "magic". It is just like the "stadium" of each frame in the video. Producers openly show their intentions and construct a fantasy world in which the audience can immerse themselves. People search for different "punctum" that can touch them and are hidden in this world, penetrating the real social life. "The Calligraphy Styles of Four Scripts" once recorded, "In ancient times, during the reign of the Yellow Emperor, things were created. There were Ju Song and Cang Jie who first made written symbols to replace the knot-tying records. It was probably inspired by observing the traces of birds...

The second is pictography, such as the sun and the moon; the third is pictophonetic characters, such as rivers and seas... For pictography, it is to imitate the shapes of the full moon and the waning moon; for pictophonetic characters, they use categories as shapes and match them with sounds." [Wei Heng of the Jin Dynasty, "The Calligraphy Styles of Four Scripts" // Also cited in: Zhang Xiaodi, "A Poetic sExploration of Chinese Contemporary Video Art from Benjamin's 'Aura'", Central Academy of Fine Arts, p. 25.] In ancient times, people observed "images" with their eyes and listened to "sounds" with their ears to understand the surrounding things, perceive the changes in the world and give them forms. With the advancement of mechanical reproduction technology, "audio-visual images" have played a direct leading role in the "impact" on vision between the camera lens and the huge screen, and have woven symbols into social and economic activities. This means that culture, as capital, has been integrated into the public's consumption behavior, playing the role of a commodity, and its own aura has faded in the economic life of mass culture. Under the research of scholars on the neoclassical consumption behavior theory and the new consumption behavior theory in mass cultural consumption, what they are most concerned about are the price of goods, consumers' preference tendencies, and income as the three main factors influencing the public's cultural consumption, as well as the utility exerted by goods under their multiple characteristics.

The actual maximum economic utility and the maximum consumer surplus value are generated when these two aspects are integrated and brought closer to each other. However, the reaction of cultural capital, which is closely related to the form of cultural consumption, to consumption and the relationship between consumer preferences and it have not received attention and emphasis.

Therefore, under the neoclassical consumption theory that only cares about price and income at this time, cultural products are actually still treated as ordinary commodities. As a result, when the public is attracted by the charm of commodities mass-produced through industrialization and replication technologies such as photography, those so-called "original

works" and "real scenes" begin to be integrated into the public and become part of industrial activities, and the mythical aura originally belonging to them fades away. The public's exposure to mythological stories has shifted from the genre of picture-story books to the image projection on the movie screen. This has also contributed to the emergence of the "media culture" during the industrial production period in the 1950s and 1960s.

For example, in the 1920s, the rapid development of the film industry represented by Hollywood in the West led to a global film trend. China took a vigilant stance and began to fully utilize traditional literary themes and cultural resources to produce a series of films of mythological, martial arts and other types, and strived to maximize commercial interests, which in turn led to the first climax of commercial films in China. [Wei Chenjie, "A Perspective on *The Cave of the Silken Web*: The Interaction between Chinese Films in the 1920s and Traditional Print Media", published in *Contemporary Cinema*, pp. 164-165.]Take the silent film *The Cave of the Silken Web* produced by Shanghai Film Company in 1927 as an example.

With the mythical novel *Journey to the West* as the background, after its release, the net profit of the box office reached 50,000 yuan. Calculated based on the living expenses of 30 yuan required by an ordinary family at that time, the figure was quite impressive. Before the film was screened, the journal *Shanghai*, which was edited and published by Shanghai Film Company and focused on film and television discussions (see Figure 7), in its fourth issue in April 1927, used a large amount of space to promote the film. Moreover, the magazine cover was printed in color for the first time, and the opening article's length was twice that of previous issues. According to the records, "It led the upsurge of shooting supernatural films at that time... and became a model of supernatural-themed works in the 1920s... According to statistics, in less than four years from 1926 to 1929, nearly thirty films related to *Journey to the West* were shot."[Data source: http://m.look.360.cn/transcoding?sign=360_e39369d1&url=-98f8ae7efe707afde]

According to the description in the documents recording this film, the film's "superb artistic conception and integration of painting into the film" on the shooting screen makes the audience feel a visual feast of "life is like a dream and a bubble". Benjamin took photography and film as examples to explain the turbulent impact of mechanical reproduction on traditional art, as well as the reasons and situations for the renewal and iterative changes of the industry. Through the camera lens, photography technology can capture the details and angles of things that people cannot see or observe with the naked eye. It can also infinitely replicate the same photo, making it lose the significance of distinguishing "original authenticity". The emergence of film has changed the way the public perceives life. Through dynamic and complex visual sensory stimulation, it has brought the public new aesthetic experiences and ways of "touching" art.

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Figure 7. Cover of the April 1927 Issue of *Shanghai* Magazine, «The Cave of the Silken Web» Special Issue

(Image source: Xue Ning. «Overview of the Literary and Pictorial Historical Materials of *The Cave of the Silken Web*», published in *Rewriting Film History*, 2014, pp. 73 - 75.) http://m.look.360.cn/transcoding?sign=360_e39369d1&url=98f8ae7efe707afde

From the above materials, it is clear that in the 1920s, with the combination of traditional Chinese printing and replication technology and film technology, the two interacted and promoted the development of the film industry, which in turn drove economic growth. The disappearance of the "aura" in art has enabled art to promote the growth and dissemination of social, economic and cultural aspects through mass media and mass consumption. Since then, myths have been separated from the dichotomy of "divinity" and "vulgarity". Through the medium of images, national literature that existed in the ideological and two-dimensional world has been brought into a vivid and tangible visual experience world. The complementary explanations of the film's pictures and texts in the promotional periodicals have generated anticipation for the

audience to watch the film.

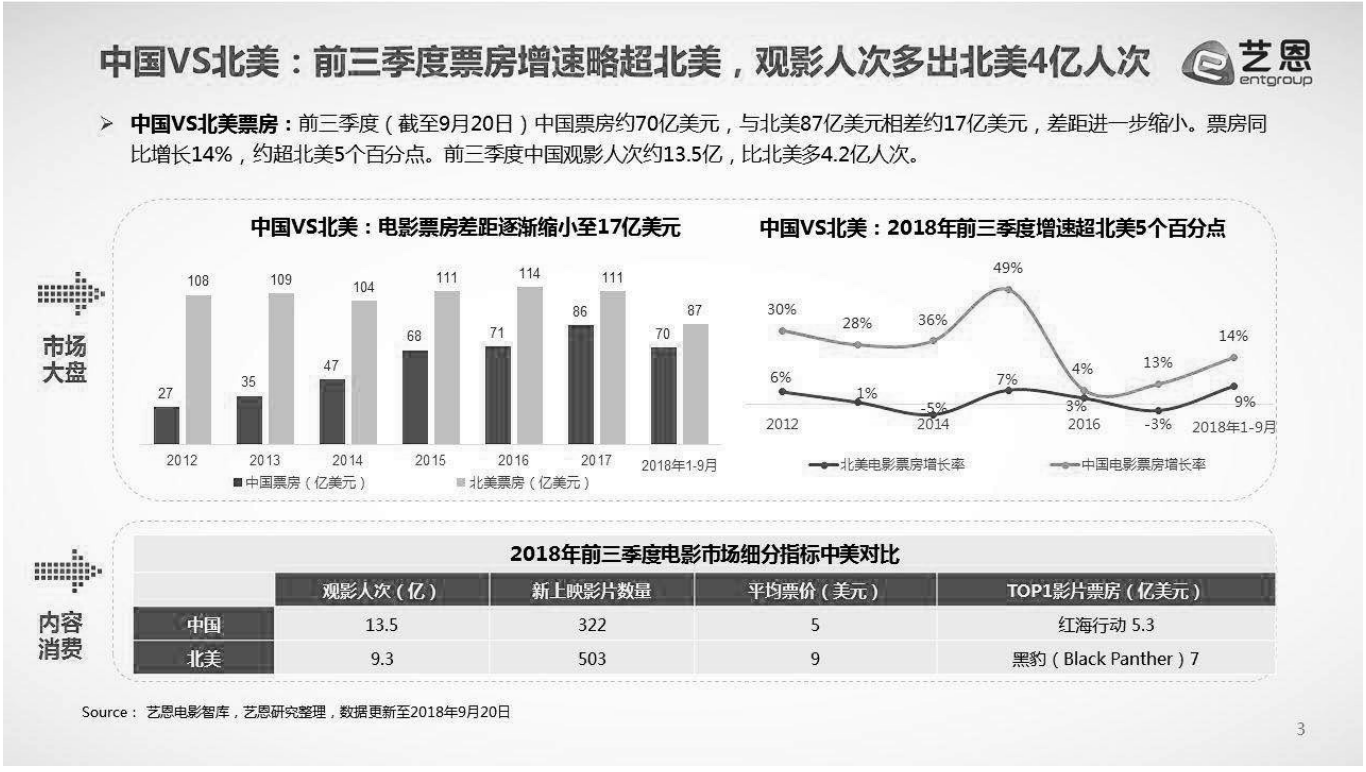
Coupled with the dazzling visual effects of the film itself, it has greatly satisfied the curiosity hidden in the public's unconsciousness and liberated the imagination about supernatural and surreal creatures that was imprisoned in their minds. [Wei Chenjie. "A Perspective on *The Cave of the Silken Web*: The Interaction between Chinese Films in the 1920s and Traditional Print Media", published in *Contemporary Cinema*, pp. 164-165.] At the same time, it has also brought rich extensions to the public's sensory experience in cultural consumption and expanded the spatial structure of the experience economy in society and the way of spreading social and cultural ideas. Still from the perspective of the public's film consumption, according to the film market consumption report for the first three quarters of 2018, the number of moviegoers in China exceeded that in North America by more than 400 million (see Figure 8). Moreover, compared with 2014, the proportion of films with medium or higher costs increased by 4 percentage points, and the box office revenue increased by 690 million yuan. Such high investment costs have laid the foundation for the industrialization of films and promoted the expansion of film production scale. [Data source: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzA4OTA-1MTYyMQ==&mid=2247495002&idx=1&sn=ebbc-26c0c9872053136ddd518eec27b6&chksm=902275d0a755f-cc6bde091a59b20afec199c49457868a19a76b6a6f595e7cea-1b0e6d782348b&mpshare=1&scene=1&srcid=1207sm-WHUVQFpcBPUEZUVHBP&key=1f80b43a638a86d46e-924640892b3e23bf9628e09d1859fa1947c40d7b3803b8b599dbfe08502ce9ee91bfb09ba2958d28f2fad76d-b675840a5227d27b3b78ea318034f16c6d179e1fc02cafd0de05b5&ascene=0&uin=MTQzMDI2Njc0MA%3D%3D&de-vicetype=iMac+MacBookAir3%2C2+OSX+OSX-+10.10.5+build(14F2511)&version=11000006&lang=zh_CN&pass_ticket=ppLn0hE06cTM%2FjDTtlQ1CH4Mjok-8abOkZQPWLSsQA9aZNLpgnb%2B0D75%2Bl1Br%2Bpye]

With the continuous development of China's economy, people's consumption ability has been continuously enhanced, and the quality of their living standards has also improved. The public's demand for spiritual and cultural products is gradually expanding, which has stimulated consumers' interest in visual communication media. The combination of various industrialized media technologies and the transformation of cultural resources into cultural capital have provided the public with more consumption choices.

Consumption has also promoted the level of industrial cultural production, further meeting the needs of the public's social and cultural life. At the same time, mechanical replication technology has broken down the small circle of elite culture and brought it onto the stage of mass culture.

Judging from the global box office rankings of movies up to 2016 (Figure 9), apart from *Furious 7* ranked fifth and *Titanic* ranked second, the remaining 18 movies are, to varying degrees, mainly themed around fantasy, mythology, and science fiction. Looking at the box office of Chinese movies

Figure 8. Comparison of Box Office Revenue between China and North America in the First Three Quarters of 2018 (Image source: EntGroup Data [.Data source: Ibid.)



序号	片名	票房（单位：百万美元）	序号	片名	票房（单位：百万美元）
1	阿凡达	2 788.0	11	小黄人大眼萌	1 157.3
2	泰坦尼克号	2 186.8	12	变形金刚 3：月黑之时	1 123.8
3	侏罗纪世界	1 669.4	13	指环王：王者归来	1 119.9
4	复仇者联盟	1 519.6	14	007：天幕危机	1 108.6
5	速度与激情 7	1 515.0	15	变形金刚 4：绝迹重生	1 104.1
6	星球大战：原力的觉醒	1 512.7	16	蝙蝠侠：黑暗骑士崛起	1 084.9
7	复仇者联盟 2：奥创纪元	1 405.0	17	加勒比海盗：聚魂棺	1 066.2
8	哈利波特与死亡圣器（下）	1 341.5	18	玩具总动员 3	1 063.2
9	冰雪奇缘	1 276.5	19	加勒比海盗：惊涛怪浪	1 045.7
10	钢铁侠 3	1 215.4	20	侏罗纪公园	1 029.2

Figure 9. Top 20 Global Box Office Movies (as of January 6, 2016) (Data source: Liu Fan, «Research on Contemporary Chinese Magic Martial Arts Films: Mythological Resources, Cultural Traditions and Secular Tastes», published in *Journal of Southwest University*, 2016, Volume 42, Issue 2, p. 130.)

based on mythological themes (Figure 10), similar to the global rankings, movies with mythological story themes also account for a large proportion of the total box office and are relatively high in the rankings. Among them, Monster Hunt, which makes extensive use of elements from traditional Chinese supernatural themes, tops the list. There are three movies based on the supernatural novel Journey to the West, ranking 11th, 15th, and 17th respectively. It can be seen that in the industrial context, the development of Chinese commercial movies is gradually based on the creation of traditional mythological story elements, which serve as a relatively important support for the industry.

However, it can also be seen that when it comes to movies with mythological and supernatural themes, Western fantasy blockbusters led by Hollywood still dominate in terms of popularity among the public. When the public engages in cultural consumption, apart from being attracted by the themes of products, they also value the plot content of the products themselves.

Taking the film industry as an example, compared with the novel, exciting, and conflict - filled plot designs in Hollywood movies, Chinese story content is relatively lacking in innovation. Most of them simply apply the original story with a little glamorous modification, lacking the kind of story experiences that can excite the public or offer “unexpected” twists. Blindly using Western story - telling techniques, such as the character design in Chen Kaige’s *The Promise*, which was influenced by the Greek *Oedipus Rex*, although it drew on both Eastern and Western myths, led to an over - saturated and collapsed narrative effect. However, analyzing the box - office data of domestic myth - themed fantasy movies in China over the past decade (Figure 10), *Monster Hunt*, which ranked first in the domestic box - office as of 2016 and was based on the stories in *Shan Hai Jing* and *Zhai Yao*, and the *Painted Skin* series and *Painted Wall* in 2008 and 2012, which were based on *Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio*, show that the public still has high hopes for Chinese traditional “mythological stories”. However, the less - than - optimistic ratings clearly indicate that the story content has not yet met the public’s expectations. “The story” plays a crucial role in the development of today’s cultural industry. This topic will be explained in the next chapter and will not be elaborated further here.

近十年中国奇幻电影票房过亿排序（票房数据截止2018年8月19日）

排序	影片名	票房（亿）	上映日期	类型	豆瓣评分
1	美人鱼	33.86	2016/2/8	喜剧、奇幻	6.7
2	捉妖记	24.4	2015/7/16	喜剧、奇幻、古装	6.7
3	捉妖记2	22.37	2015/12/18	喜剧、奇幻、古装	5
4	羞羞的铁拳	22.13	2017/9/30	喜剧、奇幻	6.9
5	寻龙诀	16.79	2015/12/18	动作、 奇幻、冒险	7.5
6	西游伏妖篇	16.52	2017/1/28	喜剧、奇幻、动作	5.6
7	西游降魔篇	12.46	2013/2/10	喜剧、奇幻、冒险	7.1
8	西游记之三打白骨精	11.98	2016/2/8	喜剧、奇幻、动作	5.6
9	长城	11.73	2016/12/16	奇幻、冒险	4.9
10	西游记之大闹天宫	10.44	2014/1/31	奇幻、动作	4.1
11	盗墓笔记	10.02	2016/8/5	惊悚、悬疑、奇幻	4.7
12	西游记之大圣归来	9.56	2015/7/10	动画、动作、奇幻	8.2
13	超时空同居	8.99	2018/5/18	喜剧、爱情、奇幻	6.9
14	西游记女儿国	7.27	2018/2/16	喜剧、爱情、奇幻	4.4
15	画皮2	7.02	2012/6/28	爱情、动作、奇幻	5.9
16	悟空传	6.96	2017/7/13	动作、奇幻	5.1
17	狄仁杰之四大天王	5.99	2018/7/27	动作、悬疑、奇幻	6.5
18	大鱼海棠	5.64	2016/7/8	动画、奇幻	6.6
19	三生三世十里桃花	5.34	2017/8/3	爱情、奇幻	3.9
20	妖猫传	5.3	2017/12/22	爱情、奇幻	6.9
21	钟馗伏魔：雪妖魔灵	4.04	2015/2/19	爱情、奇幻、动作	4.2
22	道士下山	4	2015/7/3	喜剧、冒险、奇幻	5.4
23	白发魔女传之明月天国	3.89	2014/7/31	爱情、奇幻、武侠	3.7
24	爵迹	3.82	2016/9/30	奇幻、动作	3.8
25	大话西游3	3.65	2016/9/14	喜剧、爱情、奇幻	3.6
26	重返20岁	3.65	2015/1/8	喜剧、爱情、奇幻	7.2
27	万万没想到	3.22	2015/12/18	喜剧、奇幻	5.5
28	奇门遁甲	2.99	2017/12/14	喜剧、动作、奇幻	4.4
29	二代妖精之今生有幸	2.92	2017/12/29	喜剧、爱情、奇幻	5.5
30	封神传奇	2.83	2016/7/29	动作、奇幻	2.9
31	画皮	2.32	2008/9/26	动作、惊悚、奇幻	6.5
32	解忧杂货店	2.23	2017/12/29	奇幻	5.1
33	长江七号	2.03	2008/1/30	喜剧、奇幻	6.4
34	白蛇传说	1.8	2011/9/28	爱情、动作、奇幻	4.7
35	大魔术师	1.73	2011/11/22	喜剧、爱情、奇幻	6.6
36	画壁	1.49	2011/9/29	奇幻、爱情、动作	4.5
37	冰封：重生之门	1.42	2014/4/25	喜剧、动作、奇幻	3.6
38	倩女幽魂	1.4	2011/4/19	奇幻、惊悚	5.3
39	十万个冷笑话2	1.33	2017/8/18	喜剧、动画、奇幻	7.3
40	越光宝盒	1.3	2010/3/18	喜剧、奇幻	5.2
41	28岁未成年	1.29	2016/12/9	喜剧、爱情、奇幻	5.6
42	快把我哥带走	1.25	2018/8/17	喜剧、奇幻	7.2
43	十万个冷笑话	1.19	2014/12/31	喜剧、动画、奇幻	6.3
44	鲛珠传	1.13	2017/8/11	喜剧、动作、奇幻	4.3
45	风语咒	1.11	2018/8/3	动画、冒险、奇幻	7

Figure 10. Box Office Rankings and Ratings Statistics of Fantasy Movies in China over the Past Decade

(Data source: China Box Office Bar [.Data source: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MjM5MjcyNzUwMQ==&mid=2655984989&idx=2&sn=41d6cf66bb919645aecffb0cb38480a9&chksm=bd1a55ff8a6ddce9918f5f51fdb17b19b76aec4198c1d5101b0289563b9a96fba525e331a96c&mpshare=1&scene=1&srcid=1208J1-0BpEHJ2Kn3jXzmuwSr&key=1f80b43a638a86d4361f36a31ddb0066628959dca666c3f3be2f7a8157491c219f7eb54bd4b80e07c4e984d0c69fe250e85abe01f921b86b0a3b14fcdf7dd83ae92e3d007dd3b2ae7b921e90fc63966e&ascene=0&uin=MTQzMDI2Njc0MA%3D%3D&devicetype=iMac+MacBookAir3%2C2+OSX+OSX+10.10.5+build(14F2511)&version=11000006&lang=zh_CN&pass_ticket=KkF3Ea4mGQsGVDQkpBew9ypDwUQ0wmGwG5bprDhNsyZuJN5Br0V0feMikg4aerqZ])

上映年份	电影	导演	票房（内地）
2001 年	《蜀山传》	徐克	2000 万元
2005 年	《无极》	陈凯歌	1.75 亿元
2005 年	《情癫大圣》	刘镇伟	5000 万元
2008 年	《画皮》	陈嘉上	2.04 亿元
2010 年	《越光宝盒》	刘镇伟	1.31 亿元
2010 年	《狄仁杰之通天帝国》	徐克	2.86 亿元
2011 年	《倩女幽魂》	叶伟信	1.41 亿元
2011 年	《白蛇传说》	程小东	1.8 亿元
2011 年	《画壁》	陈嘉上	1.5 亿元
2012 年	《画皮 II》	乌尔善	7 亿元
2013 年	《西游·降魔篇》	周星驰、郭子健	12.4 亿元
2013 年	《狄仁杰之神都龙王》	徐克	6 亿元
2013 年	《白狐》	牛朝阳	3154 万元
2014 年	《西游记之大闹天宫》	郑保瑞	10.4 亿元
2015 年	《钟馗伏魔：雪妖魔灵》	鲍德熹、赵天宇	4.09 亿元
2015 年	《寻龙诀》	乌尔善	16.8 亿元
2015 年	《捉妖记》	许诚毅	24.4 亿元
2015 年	《九层妖塔》	陆川	9.8 亿元
2016 年	《西游记之三打白骨精》	郑保瑞	12 亿元
2016 年	《大话西游 3》	刘镇伟	3.65 亿元
2016 年	《封神传奇》	许安	2.84 亿元
2016 年	《长城》	张艺谋	11.7 亿元
2017 年	《西游·伏妖篇》	徐克	16.5 亿元
2017 年	《悟空传》	黄建新、郭子健	6.94 亿元
2017 年	《鲛珠传》	陈嘉上、杨磊	1.14 亿元
2017 年	《妖猫传》	陈凯歌	5.3 亿元
2018 年	《捉妖记 2》	许诚毅	22.19 亿元
票房来源：艺恩电影智能库 货币单位：人民币			

Figure 11. Box Office Indices of Domestic Chinese Fantasy Movies

(Data source: Cheng Bo. The Force Awakens in Chinese Stories, published in Hotspot Reviews, 2018, Issue 2, p. 20.)

Looking closely at the box - office indices of domestic Chinese myth - themed fantasy movies in recent years (Figure 11), it can be seen from the following domestic fantasy films that almost every movie has box - office earnings of over 100 million yuan. It is not difficult to conclude that the public has a strong consumption desire for film and television creations based on mythological themes. When telling stories with myths, China can more or less reflect its local cultural styles. For example, in the description of the images of gods, it is generally like what is depicted in the Taoist classic *Xiaoyao You*: “Their skin is as white as snow, and they are as graceful as virgins. They do not eat the five grains but live on air and dew. They ride the clouds, control flying dragons, and travel beyond the four seas.” [Chen Yinchi. *A Close Reading of Zhuangzi*, Fudan University Press, May 1, 2005, p. 54.] There is an air of “floating like a meteor.” In terms of story settings, they also inherit the plot elements such as “transformation,” “soul - leaving - the - body,” and “objects turning into demons to charm people” that often appear in Chinese supernatural myth stories, like in *Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio: Painted Skin*. They follow the setting that gods appear to educate people, and the plot 预置 is permeated with Confucian ideas such as the binary opposition of right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, or the unity of man and nature, and the five virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith, thus spreading traditional culture. As Lévi - Strauss said, “All myths have a binary opposition relationship. Mythical thinking always operates in an analogical way, placing natural objects in a binary - opposition structural framework, thereby constructing an image of the world and ultimately achieving an interpretation of the world.” [Shi Keyang. *Methodology of Film and Television Criticism*, Guangzhou: Sun Yat - sen University Press, 2009, p. 95.] These fantasy myth - themed movies not only dissolve the absoluteness of the binary opposition in the myth structure. In the context of the public’s “spectacularization” [Spectacularization: It refers to a narrative form that uses images as a medium and is related to the public through narrative displacement. It is also a landscape and a novel and fantastic visual landscape presented to the public in the form of images.] consumption, which mainly involves the superimposition of visual scenes and image paradigms, they also bring new levels of visual experience to the audience. In the stories, through the transformation of character images, the opposition and integration of good and evil are revealed. In story narration, “mythical thinking always develops from being aware of the opposition to resolving these oppositions.” [Lévi - Strauss, translated by Hu Xiaohui. “The Structural Study of Myth.”]The way to resolve this is to introduce a third “intermediate mediator” [Intermediate mediator: An intermediate transformation medium proposed by Lévi - Strauss in “The Structural Study of Myth” to mediate binary opposition.] that can reconcile the binary opposition to continuously resolve the conflicts between the two opposing sides.

In summary, based on the above materials, mythological and legendary stories, as China’s local cultural resources, in

the commercial operation under industrial mechanical replication, have shed their divine "aura" and transformed into cultural capital, playing an economic role in the industry and further infiltrating into the consumption of mass culture. From the perspective of film and television, it can be reflected that myths play an important role in mass cultural consumption. In the era where images serve as a language code for storytelling, myths can also become the "punctum" of stories that trigger people's pursuit of novelty and uniqueness in consumption within the "stadium" (the overall context of image-based storytelling). In this way, it can promote the film industry to ink and cooperate with other peripheral industries (such as animation, games, etc.), driving the expansion and development of the entire cultural and creative sector.

Section 3.2: The Era of Digital Replication: Trends in Value

Transformation William Morris, the initiator of the British "Arts and Crafts Movement", opposed the separation of product design and production under mechanical industrial production, which led to the rough craftsmanship of products and the design phenomenon of making products merely for practical use. As a result, he put forward the concept of "combining art with technology", advocating the organic unity of aesthetics and function to bridge the gap between them. Although advocating only traditional handicraft technology had a somewhat utopian color, it opened the door to "modern art design" and laid the foundation for the creative concept of "aestheticization of daily life".

With the changes of the times, replication technology has also developed with the progress of science and technology. People's consumption and cultural cognition have transformed from the influence of mechanical replication technology on traditional culture, transitioning to modern cultural technologies, and then to various forms of cultural exchanges and productions of new media and technologies with characteristics such as experience, interaction, and digitization in the digital process. At the same time, with the improvement of social life, the public's demand for culture is gradually increasing, and the economic value of products and the cultural value of art are beginning to combine, gradually transforming from the inherent use value of commodities to experience value.

Since then, under the booming development trend of modern cultural industries, the influence of culture in commodities has gradually increased. After people's material needs for commodities are saturated through the consumption process, they turn to the satisfaction and needs of spiritual life. The "aura" of art and mythology dissipates as the development of the cultural industry and the application of the Internet gradually blur and integrate the boundaries between cultural production and consumption. Moreover, with the arrival of the great aesthetic economy, against the backdrop of the integration of art and technology, the gap between the public and cultural art has also been filled. People's expectations for cultural experiences during consumption gradually overshadow the satisfaction of practical use efficiency. The "aura" of art is integrated into commodities, and at the same time, it also upgrades the value of art from the initial worship and display value to the experiential economic value that has always existed but has never been expressed.

In the book *The Experience Economy*, James Gilmore divides economic offerings into four models: products, goods, services, and experiences [B. Joseph Pine, James H. Gilmore. *The Experience Economy*. Translated by Xia Yeliang, etc. Machinery Industry Press, April 2002, pp. 9-10]. And the value of these four models shows a gradually ascending trend. With the innovation of science, technology, and information media in the era, culture, as their carrier and an essential element and driving force of the economy, the "force" and "beauty" presented by the two continuously promote the development of the cultural industry.

As a result, the experience model in the cultural industry plays an increasingly dominant role in the two-way integration and upgrading of cultural products and services, becoming the core force for exerting the effectiveness of the market economy, and the public's consumption model has also been updated with the advancement of science, technology, and culture. From the "aura worship" of cultural consumption in the past to the current satisfaction of spiritual needs, and then to the "sympathetic" experience consumption of cultural entertainment through the contact of the five senses of the human body, it fully demonstrates that the public's demands for consumption experiences in the cultural industry are constantly changing. According to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "field", "A field can be defined as a network of objective relations existing between various positions, or a configuration." .[Bai Xiaoqing. Cited from *The Multi-field Development Strategy of IP in Comic Adapted Films—Taking the Marvel Superhero Series Films as an Example*, published in *Contemporary Cinema*, pp. 151-153] The field is an internal force, a mediator constructed by workers from all walks of life participating in social and economic activities, and it is an autonomous small world generated by the differentiation of the social world.

At the same time, the field is also an open concept. The small world only functions when it is subsumed within a relational system, and its boundaries end where the effects of the field no longer have an impact, having the characteristic of dynamic fuzziness. Due to different types of capital, fields can be divided into many kinds, such as academic fields, artistic fields, economic fields, legal fields, power fields, etc. Bourdieu divides capital into economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. Capital is the link connecting the scattered elements in each field, and different types of capital in each field will play different roles in that field. The nature of the field also varies according to the pro-

portion of various types of capital within it. The field is like a game. Participants in it can maintain the rules of the game, or they can participate in the game, change the relative value of different chips in their hands, alter the relative proportion between different types of capital, compete with opponents in the game field, and suppress the value of the capital in the opponents' hands to change the rules of the game.[(France) Pierre Bourdieu, Loïc Wacquant. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Translated by Li Meng, Li Kang. Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 1998, pp. 137-13] In this "game field" where various capitals compete, Brian Moore proposed the concept of the "affordance field" based on the theory of "field". Among them, "affordance" or "functional affordance" is a concept in ecological psychology proposed by the American psychologist James J. Gibson in 1997. It means that humans or organisms can directly perceive (direct perception) the relationship between the perceivable information scales in the environment through their own perceptibility. "The 'affordance field' emphasizes the interactive experience between the subject and the object... The affordance loop contains elements such as technical materials, social elements, economic elements, time elements, space elements, and representative elements. In the context of the cultural industry, different elements form a loop, and starting from any one element can form the same channels, cycles, connections, or attributes. This loop or set constructs an actor network." [Xiang Yong, Bai Xiaoqing. *Field Resonance: The Cross-border Development Strategy of the Value of Online Literature IP*, published in *Modern Communication*, August 2016, pp. 110-112] In the experiential economic field of the cultural industry, the "technology-material" affordance is reflected in the public's consumption process through aspects such as interaction with technical media under new media, immersive space experiences, and the application of designed products with perceptual affordance.

At the same time, it allows consumers to achieve internal spiritual resonance through the external contact of their bodies with things during the experience consumption process, and thus complete the embodied cognition of themselves after a whole consumption process [Embodied cognition: The interactive relationship between the direct behavioral experience of the body and the psychological perception state] The "affordance" theory is usually applied in product design, interaction design, psychology, etc., by studying organisms and the environment, but it is also applicable to economic life. In the cultural and creative industry, to make the experiential value of products fully exert their affordance for consumers, producers need to analyze and rely on their composition. When consumers experience commodities, they are receivers of commodity information. Each receiver has different cultural and educational backgrounds, life values, social activity experiences, emotional "pain points", etc. Therefore, to trigger the hidden "punctum" in each person's consumption experience, producers must relate their own conditions to the external environment.

At the same time, by using the human ability of "action-psychology" mutual care in embodied cognition, combining the two and providing overall care, they can accurately grasp the common emotions of the public and make them participate in the activities of the cultural and creative industry. As a powerful cultural resource for media dissemination today, mythology has undergone a leapfrog value transformation across time and space, from being an ideological belief with only worship value at the beginning, to becoming a display value that plays an important role in cultural consumption in culture and art, and then to becoming a full-fledged experiential value generated for the public through digital technology when consuming products. As cultural capital, mythology plays an important active role in the field of experiential economy. In the understanding of a thing, since John Locke [John Locke (August 29, 1632 – October 28, 1704), a British philosopher], this understanding has been divided into the "primary qualities" of things, which have stability and repeatability, such as the rational and stable characteristics in mathematics like points, lines, planes, and proportions, and the "secondary qualities" that are mainly dominated by subjective cognition, such as the hue, touch, taste, and sound of objective objects, which may change according to the perception of different people and have the characteristic of instability. [Zhang Yao. *The Metaphorical Body*. Hangzhou: China Academy of Art Press, July 2006, p. 124] And this "secondary quality" is exactly an important existence that directly relates to people's bodies and emotions. It is also the starting point for the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty to propose the concept of "body schema" in his study of the sensory experience of the body's perception of the outside world. The body schema, from the actions of people's unconscious self-adjustment in interacting with things in the objective world, reflects the entire "perceptual-motor" ability of people's lifestyle and personal attitude towards understanding the world, illustrating "the holistic characteristics of the body in perceptual experience". It has an image rather than an objective spatiality in the situation of implementing or achieving a certain goal and exists in time. When people come into contact with the outside world through their limbs, they can understand their surrounding situation, gain experience, and be emotionally touched psychologically, but all of this is also based on people's past historical experiences. Therefore, in the development of the experience model in the cultural industry, it is necessary to understand the emotional tendencies, preferences of consumers, or the common experiences and cultural tacit knowledge generated by the public in a specific environment. Then, through the embodiment generated by the connection of the five senses of touch, vision, taste, hearing, and smell between the experience situation or product and the body, it can be realized. Only in this way can consumers obtain cultural awareness while consuming commodities, achieve resonance between physical experience and emotion, immerse themselves in it, and enable products to achieve the maximum benefit effect in the cultural industry. The transformation

of the cultural value of mythology requires the emotional consciousness generated through the body schema system to complete. At the same time, digital media of communication also have an important impact on the public's preferences in consumption. From the products and network media for public communication and interaction in daily life to various experiences in daily life and entertainment activities in space, when interacting with these external digital media entities, the public will also have different experience feelings based on their usage.

Therefore, in the field of experiential economy, the combination of cultural capital and technical media is essential, and it is also closely related to the commodity affordance that consumers can feel during the experience process and the embodiment generated by their own actions and perceptions under the body schema system. In today's era of the development of digital media technology, digital media is gradually penetrating into people's daily entertainment lifestyles and integrating with various fields of art and technology such as the Internet, games, art, and film and television. Based on the scientific and technological communication media such as photography, printing, broadcasting, and television that developed in the 19th century, digital media has once again narrowed the distance between people and these audio-visual media. By matching and connecting with people's body movements, a new consumption model of human-computer interaction or spatial immersive experience has been established. In a sense, the emergence of this interactive technology, as described by William Gibson in *Neuromancer*, has dissolved the binary opposition between humans and nature, and between reality and virtuality, and has become the cyberspace in post-human society where things can be perceived through digital technology[Zhao Zhan. *Research on the Narrative Language of New Media*. Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, March 2012, p. 10].

The application of digital replication technology provides the "technology-material" affordance in the field of the mythology industry, which takes intangible cultural resources of mythology as the basis, commodity exchange as the dominant factor, and intangible cultural capital online as the link. As an intangible cultural resource, mythology, "under the guidance of the commodity laws of the market economy", is transformed into intangible cultural capital and interacts and circulates with economic capital and social capital in the field, opening up the development dimensions of the cultural and creative industry.

Taking the cultural and creative products of the Dunhuang Academy as an example, since it was designated as one of the first batch of national cultural relic units for the development of cultural and creative products in 2016, based on the aim of "telling Chinese stories well", it has begun to use digital cultural technology and the Internet and other media to establish a story brand for the cultural and creative industry. In 2017, Tencent, together with Bloomage Cultural and Creative, a cultural and creative team that created the popular "teamLab Dance Art Exhibition & Future Amusement Park" holographic image lighting art space immersive experience, and the Dunhuang Academy, created the immersive museum experience exhibition "Mysterious Dunhuang". By integrating digital multimedia lighting technology with Dunhuang cultural relics, mural images, and the mythological stories of gods and Buddhas in the images, it has become an immersive experience space. For example, the animated story of the *Nine-Colored Deer* drawn according to the Buddhist mythological story of Cave 297 of the Mogao Grottoes in the Northern Wei Dynasty（from 386 AD to 534 AD）, the dynamic image "Domed Sky" projected onto the dome using digital technology (Figure 12ß), and the multimedia introduction of the entire exhibition covered by AR technology through Tencent's "Museum Officer" and "Digital Dunhuang".



Figure 12. The Dynamic Image of «Domed Sky» on the Top of the Third Floor of the Museum (Image source: Sohu website)

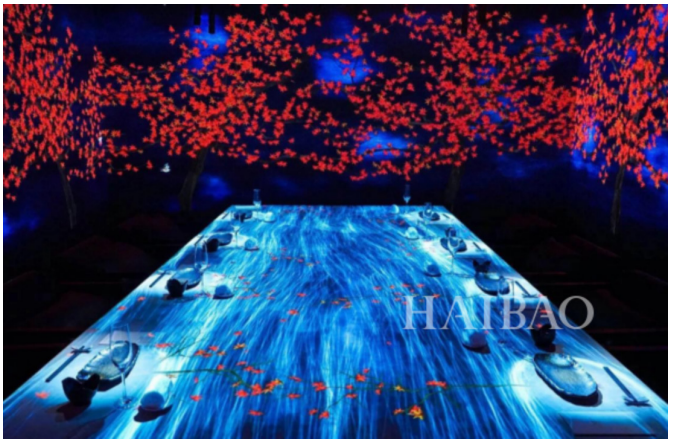


Figure 13. Light and Shadow Immersion Experience (Image source: Ibid.)

In terms of interactive applications, the Dunhuang Academy has utilized virtual simulation technology to provide an online virtual tour of the grotto scenic spots. When visitors interact with the mural images on the screen in the exhibition space, they can perceive the colorful changes and fading of

the mural images from different periods, evoking emotions of amazement or pity. Taking the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang as an example, the "Digital Dunhuang" exhibition held in Lanzhou in 2014, supported by digital technology, displayed high-definition mural images obtained through the digital acquisition of cloud murals via network computers.

By interacting with visitors through the mythological stories in the murals and leveraging the experience technology that combines movement and stillness, as well as the interplay between the virtual and the real, it has triggered emotional fluctuations in consumers, thus completing their psychological schemas. The Dunhuang tourism industry, which combines cultural and digital media for interactive innovation, set a record during the National Day Golden Week in 2012, with the daily number of visitors to the Mogao Grottoes exceeding the carrying capacity by six times .[Dunhuang Academy, Getty Conservation Institute: *Research on the Visitor Carrying Capacity of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang*, Outline of the Development Plan for the Construction of Dunhuang as a National Cultural and Tourism City, Dunhuang, October 2013, p. 28] Technology has driven the economic development of the tourism industry. As a resource-based tourism industry, Dunhuang, by leveraging its mythological story image resources and combining them with digital technology, has witnessed the development of its cultural tourism industry rising year by year since 2000 (except for a decline in 2003 due to the impact of SARS) (Figure 14, 15).

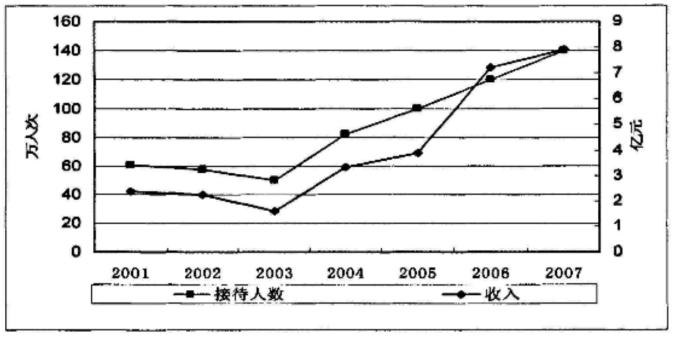


Figure 14. The Number of Tourists Received and Tourism Revenue in Dunhuang

(Data source: Zhou Jiang. Research on the Development of Tourism Industry Clusters in Resource-based Tourist Destinations—Taking Dunhuang City, Gansu Province, China, as an Example, Lanzhou University, p. 30.)

年份	甘肃省		敦煌市		敦煌市旅游区位熵
	总GDP（亿元）	旅游收入（亿元）	总GDP（亿元）	旅游收入	
2002	1073	28.6	14.95	2.39	5.9978
2003	1161	26.83	16.76	2.2365	5.7744
2004	1293	55.25	19.1006	3.3429	4.0958
2005	1301.06	62.56	20. 8961	3.91	3.8915
2006	2275	80.2	24	7.236	8.55252
2007	2703.98	115.91	29.09	8.06	6.4635
2008	3176.11	137.5	34.62	4.9575	3.3077
2009	3380	192.77	39	7	3.1471

数据来源：甘肃年鉴（2003—2010）

Figure 15. The Tourism Reception Revenue in Dunhuang

(Data source: Ibid., p. 31.)

In October 2018, it collaborated with Tencent Charity and the "Digital Donor Program" public welfare activity project developed by its affiliated game company. An H5 online mini-game was launched, which allows people to recolour the faded mural patterns of Dunhuang and obtain mural images with their own color style combinations. Experiencers interact in real-time with this online virtual program through terminal mobile electronic devices. In the form of a game, it spreads the concepts of cultural relic protection and innovation, and expands the development model of Dunhuang culture in the creative industry.

In the game, through the manipulation of images, people generate a two-way and close interaction mode between humans and machines through a visual narrative of "a series of development, circulation, and promotion 'continuation' processes from form, style, image, concept to culture"[Arthur Danto (USA). *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art*. Translated by Wang Chunchen. Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2007, p. 88], and receive feedback.

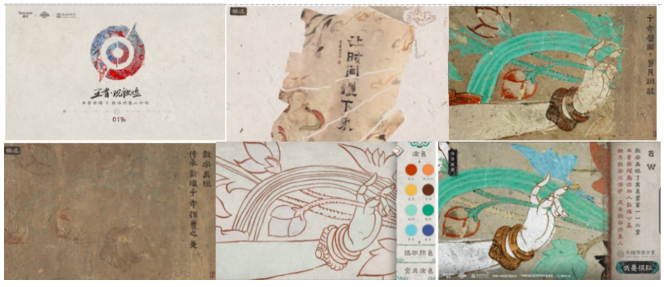


Figure 16. The Game Interface of the Digital Donor Program (Image source: Screenshot of the H5 interactive game)

Dunhuang cultural and creative products extend through multiple touchpoints. With its own cultural capital at the core, within the field of cultural and creative industries, it timely utilizes the mythological stories, images of flying apsaras, and various Buddhist classic stories that can arouse the public's interest, combining with the image narrative methods of new media technology. This enables the public to have a more vivid consumption experience through touch and physical immersion during cultural experience consumption. As a result, it drives a positive development trend of mutual conversion, mutual promotion, and mutual benefit among cultural capital, economic capital, and social capital within the field of cultural and creative industries. Thus, under the impetus of cultural and creative industries, the cultural resources of Dunhuang are transformed.

Within the entire loop of the affordance field, by leveraging the power of each affordance element, it connects and interweaves among various industries such as museums, tourism, games, and animation, gradually creating a Dunhuang cultur-

al and creative brand that can "tell Chinese stories".

Dunhuang cultural and creative products extend through multiple touchpoints. With its own cultural capital at the core, within the field of cultural and creative industries, it timely utilizes the mythological stories, images of flying apsaras, and various Buddhist classic stories that can arouse the public's interest, combining with the image narrative methods of new media technology. This enables the public to have a more vivid consumption experience through touch and physical immersion during cultural experience consumption. As a result, it drives a positive development trend of mutual conversion, mutual promotion, and mutual benefit among cultural capital, economic capital, and social capital within the field of cultural and creative industries. Thus, under the impetus of cultural and creative industries, the cultural resources of Dunhuang are transformed. Within the entire loop of the affordance field, by leveraging the power of each affordance element, it connects and interweaves among various industries such as museums, tourism, games, and animation, gradually creating a Dunhuang cultural and creative brand that can "tell Chinese stories". Through the case, it can be seen that during the application of mythology, its cultural value, along with the development of technology and in combination with the cultural and creative industry, is transforming towards display and experiential value in a consumption mode that caters to the public's aesthetics and physical sensory immersion. In this process, the resources it contains are transformed into capital, demonstrating economic value. It combines with the public's immersion in space during consumption to achieve emotional resonance in a common scenario.

Section 3.3 The Development Trend of the Aura of Mythology in the Cultural

Industry Mythology, as a cultural resource, intervenes and interacts between elite culture and mass culture through various forms of existence, and undergoes transformation in the process. During this transformation, the two cultures promote each other, contributing to the prosperous development of the cultural and creative industry. As elite culture, mythology has a profound historical accumulation, providing scholars with rich resources for researching culture and art. It supplies energy for aspects such as education guidance and academic research. At the same time, it also serves as a practice for applying mythology in mass culture, guiding and inspiring mass aesthetic consumption, and offering high-quality innovative strategies for the cultural resources it contains. In mass culture, mythology, as a popular cultural resource that can fully arouse the public's curiosity and desire for exploration, and as the main trend in the development of the creative industry, can promptly grasp the public's preferences and analyze the public's interests in industries related to mythology. It thus becomes the guiding direction for elite culture to serve the cultural and creative industry. For example, regarding the education of teenagers, overly dogmatic oral cultivation of moral qualities and cultural instruction may encounter resistance. However, if we use entertainment industries such as games, films and television, literature, and comics that are based on creativity and have educational significance and are favored by the corresponding age groups as a guide, it can achieve twice the result with half the effort. Therefore, mythological stories with a fictional theme play a role here. Culture in people's social life is divided into three levels (Figure 17). Expanding from the inside out, they are the core layer mainly composed of inherited customs, morals, etc., the middle layer of laws, systems, etc. based on this foundation, and the outer layer of entertainment and fashion that is closest to the public's daily life.[Chen Shaofeng, Zhang Libo. *Business Models of the Cultural Industry*. Beijing: Peking University Press, August 2011, p. 19.] [Chen Shaofeng, Zhang Libo. *Business Models of the Cultural Industry*. Beijing: Peking University Press, August 2011, p. 19.] Although mythology appears in the form of historical and cultural accumulation in aspects such as cultural inheritance and the continuation of customs, and becomes a very stable civilization with little possibility of change in the core layer. However, in the cultural and creative industry, mythological resources that integrate creativity, art, and cultural life are most closely related to the outer layer of the cultural structure.

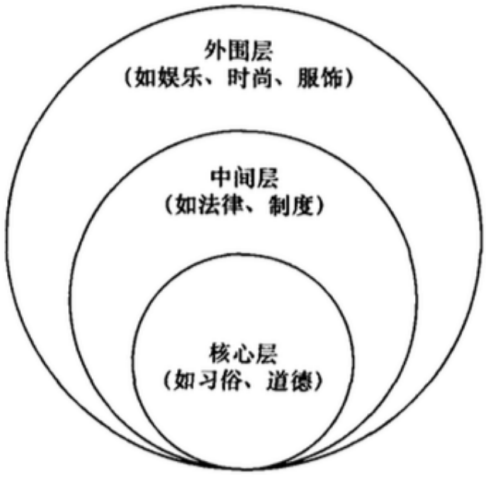


Figure 17. Schematic Diagram of the Cultural Structure (Image source: Chen Shaofeng, Zhang Libo. *Business Models of the Cultural Industry*. Beijing: Peking University Press, August 2011, p. 20.)

From the perspective of creativity, to develop the cultural and creative industry using mythological stories, what is precisely needed is the special culture that emerges after removing the old and obscure veil. This culture is novel, in line with the current public consumption interests, and satisfies the public's entertainment spirit. By combining creativity and innovation, elite human resources from different fields, and the economic and technological foundation, a series of cultural and creative industry chains can be expanded to explore business opportunities. For example, there are story-based industry chains derived from internal content IP, collaborative industry chains

where various industries develop in a mutually supportive manner, or integrated industry chains that require the cooperation of multiple elements (such as talents, funds, and capital) within the industry on the basis of collaboration. [Ibid., p. 47]The resource strength required in each field also varies.

As a language through which people convey information, mythology has the characteristic of the coexistence of reversibility and irreversibility in time. Mythology is an ancient cultural accumulation passed down through history, and in terms of use value, it exists in our past, present, and future,not restricted by time. [Claude Lévi-Strauss. "The Structural Study of Myth", excerpted from Structural Anthropology, Volume 1, Part 3, Chapter 11, originally published in Journal of American Folklore, 1955, Vol. 78, pp. 428-444.] It is also the "archetype" theory of Northrop Frye, a Canadian literary critic in the 20th century. [[Archetype: Frye believed that mythology is the origin of all literature, containing all literary forms and themes, enabling it to still have the power of dissemination despite the changes in ideology over thousands of years. Cited from Baidu Encyclopedia. https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%8E%9F%E5%9E%8B%E6%89%B9%E8%AF%84/5262205]] This theory makes the public aware that the so-called "harmony between man and nature" concept corresponding to the small sun god on earth (from the image of "emperor" to the concept of "son of heaven" and then to the revolutionary leader) and the great sun god in the sky (the archetype) is a continuation, transformation, or rewriting of the farming myth concept that originated in the Neolithic Age more than ten thousand years ago. [Ye Shuxian. "How to Retell Myths", Journal of Yangtze University, Vol. 29, No. 1, February 2006, p. 17]When the public engages in cultural consumption such as daily entertainment, they can feel the existence of mythology through brands, cultural traditions, and story content when purchasing goods and come into contact with it. At this time, the invariability of mythology in time is eliminated, and it flashes into people's lives through various carriers. Therefore, with this unique temporal nature, the development of mythology in the cultural and creative industry also gives rise to a "duality" within itself. The first aspect is the "original story" power inherent in mythology itself, that is, the original classic stories passed down through historical evolution, which carry the significance of national historical memories and express human perception of the universe and thinking and understanding of society and nature. The second aspect is that after creative processing, the mythological archetypes are recoded and combined in various forms such as literature, film and television, games, and brands, becoming symbols with entertainment value and spiritual influence that can be retold in brand story content, stimulating social and economic prosperity and reflecting social ideology in culture.

Therefore, in the cultural and creative industry, mythology becomes a creative resource for designing economic consumption content. Since the 20th century, a worldwide upsurge of myth retelling has led to the rise of the "new mythicism trend". The "aura" of mythology has also reappeared in life in new language forms with the recoding and reconstruction of mythology and the transformation of media methods in the digital age. The leapfrog progress of digital media technology and the Internet, combined with the cultural and creative industry, is subtly changing the public's lifestyle and ideology. As a powerful content driver, the "myth retelling" that began to rise globally in 2005, although limited to the commercialization of literary creation, still indicates that being swept along by the economy and the market, mythology has entered the consumption era and become a symbol in mass culture. When mythology is divided into a "duality", its aura, which was buried in mass culture, also begins to revive and become the two wings of its development. On one hand, it is still attached to the elite culture accumulated in history, distantly connected to people; on the other hand, it infiltrates into the public's daily consumption, with stories as the content, and integrates into the brand culture that consumers admire.

Chapter 4: The Reconstruction of Aura: Industrial Innovation in Myth Retelling

Section 4.1 The Industrial Integration of Mythological Stories in Cultural and Creative Scenarios

Driven by the cultural and creative industry, the operation of the social economy is increasingly inclined towards a creative economic model that combines scenario economy and cultural economy for development. Stories have become a driving factor in the development of the cultural and creative industry. In addition to relying on technical quality, the operation of product brands also takes into account the cultural value content they contain, which is an important factor that the public pays attention to during consumption. The diversified needs and consumption experiences of consumers for products, as well as the changing situation where numerous communication and media platforms have become the main communication platforms for users, have prompted the content technology of the creative industry to be enriched and upgraded accordingly. Stories are the driving force behind cultural and creative production, and they also serve as a strong content IP (abbreviation for "Intellectual Property") that can iterate products and stack brand levels, laying the foundation for capital production.

Content power is the starting point for the expansion and development of the creative industry where original power and production mechanisms can ferment and grow on their own after the accumulation of high - quality brand cultural completion under perfect conditions.[Wu Sheng. *Super IP*. Beijing: CITIC Press, July 2016, p. 8]As a cultural resource,

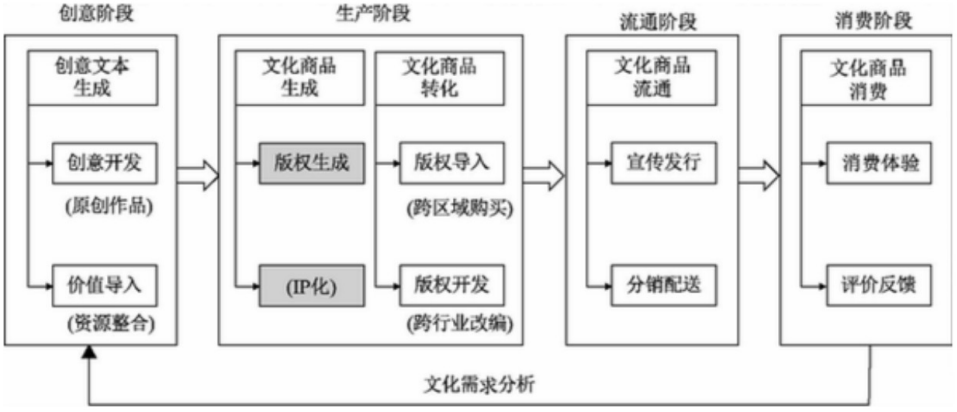


Figure 18. The Transformation Process from Cultural Resources to Cultural Products (Image source: Xiang Yong, Bai Xiaoqing. «Audience Positioning and Value Evolution of Cultural Industry IP Development under the New Normal», *Journal of Peking University*, January 2017, Vol. 54, No. 1, p. 124.)

mythology is the source of inspiration for content creativity in the "IP - ization" process of the cultural industry. As shown in Figure 18, the process of transforming content resources into product industries is different from the immediate production and consumption of consumable items. It is a closed - loop link of self - circular operation.[Xiang Yong, Bai Xiaoqing. "Audience Positioning and Value Evolution of Cultural Industry IP Development under the New Normal", *Journal of Peking University*, January 2017, Vol. 54, No. 1, p. 124]The development and integration of cultural resources is the most preliminary stage in the entire process and also the first step in enabling mythology to be integrated into the cultural and creative market as capital.

In the social context intertwined with network and mobile cloud technologies, an era of scenario-based consumption has been constructed. This scenario breaks through the limitations of time and space. Using technical media as a connection, through big data analysis of the public's consumption preferences, characteristics, and emotional needs, and taking story content as the basis, it creates and designs "tailor-made" personalized demand services that are more precisely targeted for each consumer. It also conducts property rights development and generates the circulation and distribution of cultural commodities. Scenario economy, based on the cross-border integration of various new technologies and models, is a new ecological resource that promotes industrial growth, an incubator for innovative applications, and an experimental space for enterprises to provide the public with more lifestyle choices in creative production. [Mo Zhenzhen, Wang Jian. "Scenario: The Generator of New Economic Innovation", published in Economy and Management, 2018, 32(06), pp. 51-55.]

When consumers have a combined online and offline consumption experience of commodity content, they share stories through social media to achieve emotional resonance. After establishing connections with each other and forming a cluster, they provide information feedback on their experience of the commodities, supplying data for the development of new creative content. This enables the content industry to carry out more complete industrial incubation and exploration. Through such a cyclical process, the scenario economy is gradually optimized and upgraded. As the prototype of content stories in the scenario economy, mythology, under the application of the cultural and creative industry, is retold and reconstructed in combination with the current era background to meet the public's aesthetic and emotional needs in daily life, as well as their actual interest demands. The mythology generated in response to these demands has a certain degree of publicity during the dissemination process. It gathers information dissemination and the co-presence of virtual and real spaces, transforms into commodities, and has an interactive and entertaining nature based on senses and emotions with the receiving subjects.[Yan Xianglin. "Contemporary Mythology and Its Aesthetic Consciousness", published in Social Sciences in China, 2009, No. 3, p. 174.]

With the optimization of audio-visual media tools, ancient mythological themes stimulate consumers' aesthetic consciousness of seeking novelty and fantasy through rich sensory language. In the consumer society, the cultural texts of mythological stories, after "N-level coding" [N-level coding: After Ye Shuxian redefined the "great tradition" (the civilization that uses images, oral traditions, and artifacts to narrate before the expression of civilization in writing) and the "small tradition" (the civilization recorded in writing after the emergence of writing), it is a set of "coding systems" that arranges the expressions of texts, images, and artifacts in chronological order. "In a dynamic historical perspective, the cultural text coding of the 'great tradition' is the first-level coding; the'small tradition' with the emergence of writing is the second-level coding; the early classics written in text are the third-level coding; all rewritten texts after the classic period are uniformly classified as the third-level coding." ,[Ye Shuxian. "The N-level Coding Theory of Cultural Texts—The Overall Interpretation Strategy from the 'Great Tradition' to the 'Small Tradition'", published in Journal of Baise University, 2013, 26(1), pp. 2-3.] become symbolic commodities. Under the symbolic consumption of the public in the cultural

and creative industry, a new "aura" of mythology is re-established in brands and the experience economy.

For example, product brands established with Greek mythology as the story prototype encode the cultural connotations expressed in the stories and use them to establish the cultural image and brand purpose of the brands, thus enabling consumers to have a more comfortable consumption experience. Examples include "Sisyphus Bookstore" and "Starbucks".

The experiential consumption of mythology is the desire for material or spiritual things generated by people's physical behavior to understand the depth of space and the combination of subconscious emotional experiences. The story content of mythology covers all aspects of the public's life. It is like an adhesive that creates a common value, enabling people to gather and connect through it. John Gardner, an American modernist novelist, once said, "True art can create a myth that enables society to exist rather than wither." [(USA) Jonathan Gottschall. The Storytelling Animal—How Stories Make Us Human, translated by Xu Yashu, Li Zongyi. CITIC Publishing Group, April 2017, p. 39.]Mythology is born from people's experiences and is passed on through stories told from mouth to mouth. Each nation and region, despite having different cultural customs, is gathered together by stories. It can reflect the true emotions of the human heart, maintain its timeless nature across time and space, and still be able to tell "the basic structure of human nature and emotional issues" in the language of each nation even after the passage of time, giving full play to the potential of mythology itself. It can be attached to art, economy, and various social forms.

In art, its "aura" attaches to people's visual senses. Using this as a bridge, it transforms into the self, becomes a spiritual perception, and thus reaches the inner spiritual "eye". After the mutual reflection between the self and the object, it becomes an aesthetic in the process of cognition and turns into a metaphor. This metaphor existing in the common consciousness becomes the content of commodities, promotes the establishment of IP, and forms the basic elements for copyright development, thus being incorporated into the application of the scenario economy.

Section 4.2: Story-driven by Myth as the Prototype

Mythological stories are formed from people's experiences of perceiving the world. As mentioned above, as a cultural resource, mythology combines with the economy in the cultural and creative industry and transforms into cultural capital, serving as the story driver that forms the basis for IP evolution in the process of commodity circulation. The differences in the development of mythology and the perception of similar things between the East and the West depend on the fundamental differences in their development sources. Since mythology is the product of the initial cognitive experiences of the ancestors, it has been passed down to this day with the folk customs of the public.

This has also led to cultural differences between regions and differences in the common memories carried in the narration of stories. Take, for example, the supernatural mythological stories in the East and the West, which are similar in content but slightly different in narrative person techniques and the ideological connotations of understanding the world. Compare the novel The Coffee Pot by the French supernatural writer Théophile Gautier and The Painted Wall in Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio by Pu Songling. Both stories tell about the protagonist's encounter with a woman resurrected from a painting.

The difference is that The Coffee Pot is narrated from the first-person perspective, and its view of love is related to the spiritual level. The story symbolically expresses the opposition between the protagonist's real world and the dream world, which is a romantic world yearned for and praised.

However, The Painted Wall is retold in the third-person way. The story of the protagonist and the fairy in the painting is related to appearance. As described in the text of The Painted Wall, "On the east wall were painted celestial maidens scattering flowers. Among them was a girl with hanging hair, smiling and holding a flower, her cherry lips about to move, and her eyes full of charm... Zhu stared for a long time and unconsciously became entranced... Gradually, it became indecent, and the fragrance of orchid and musk filled the heart..." [Pu Songling (Qing Dynasty,from 317 AD to 420 AD). The Complete Newly Annotated Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio, edited by Zhu Qikai. People's Literature Publishing House, September 1989, p. 9 in total]. The fantasy world that the protagonist enters is a world of disrespect presented by the indulgence of the heart in Buddhism, with a certain critical color. [Tian Qingsheng. "Gautier's The Coffee Pot and Pu Songling's The Painted Wall", published in World Literature Review, October 31, 2007.]

Section 4.3: The Symbolic Consumption of Mythology

When the public consumes cultural life, they are also in a cycle of "communication-reception" of information. They are both consumers and producers of cultural commodities. With the optimization and progress of digital media technology, the presentation of rich media [Rich media: A combination of multiple programming languages for the dissemination of advertisements] communication forms brings people's reception of information into an embedded and boundary-blurred immersive state. For example, in all daily activities carried out on the Internet, such as games, office work, and communication, people are virtualized into independent codes in this virtual world. Through information dissemination, they are connected and woven in the field constructed by the network and

immersed in it. This immersion is different from the tangible and perceptible external scene experience that can touch the human senses in a concrete space. It is a spiritual immersion obtained in a field linked by stories and related to emotional consciousness. Through the media dissemination of science and technology, people can cross the gap of spatial distance and achieve "co-presence" in the digital world, thus enabling communication. In the cultural and creative industry, it plays an important role in the circulation of commodity brands or IPs.

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Technology is changing the way people receive information and also changing the dissemination carriers of stories in the cultural industry. As a type of story theme, mythology is regarded as a meaningful cultural story that can arouse the public's consumption enthusiasm and is incorporated into the system of cultural and creative symbolic consumption. As a story theme passed down through the ages, it has become the crystallization of people's attitudes when they perceive the world and experience similar situations. In this consumption era, as content, mythology combines with the application of means such as "advertising, fashion systems, and product packaging" in the commodity economy. It fully mobilizes the cultural resources such as cultural meanings, concepts, goals, and values that consumers care about, combines commodities with these cultural resources, and makes commodities become symbolic symbols that can strongly attract consumers' attention and carry cultural meanings. [Xiao Xianjing. "A Symbolic Interpretation of Consumerist Culture", published in The Journal of Humanities, January 15, 2004, pp. 170-175.]

In the present, from the "duality" of mythology mentioned above, in symbolic consumption, in addition to the historical texts left over, modern society is also creating mythology. Based on economic consumption, just like the ancient ancestors, the modern public creates myths of celebrities, IPs, brands, etc. through symbolic consumption, and generates worship and pursuit to meet their sensory, emotional, and environmental atmosphere experience needs, as well as a series of material needs that can show social status and taste. For example, the Italian luxury brand "Versace", established in 1987 and marked by the nine-headed snake beauty in mythological stories.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Mythology, since the beginning of the cognitive revolution, has carried historical experiences, accompanied time, transmitted information to people, and gathered strength. Its aura has become story power in the cultural and creative industry, the cultural connotations experienced by consumers during symbolic consumption, and the emotional and sensory atmosphere generated in space, thus being worshipped in the process of mass consumption. In the creative industry, mythology can be a literary form, an ideology, or the prototype of a creative story. Even the psychological emotions generated by the public's worship of commodities under the consumption consciousness are the discovery and stimulation of the public's collective subconscious.

Accompanying people's life and production, in a sense, mythology has never disappeared. From the "great tradition" civilization expressed by objects, oral traditions, and images to the "small tradition" recorded in writing, and until today's continuous coding and re-translation of traditional classics and their application as story prototypes in the commodity culture economy, mythology, in its invisible form, adapts to the scenario changes of each era and brings various different experience and feeling modes to the public. However, in all cases, through its narration, it shows people a colorful and unique world. Especially in the field dominated by spiritual, cultural, and experiential consumption, mythology, through the joint supply mode with various industries and capitals, has expanded the development boundaries of the cultural and creative market. Mythology and its aura, in the changes of era scenarios time and time again, have accompanied people to complete the value transformation from "creation to rebirth to sublimation".

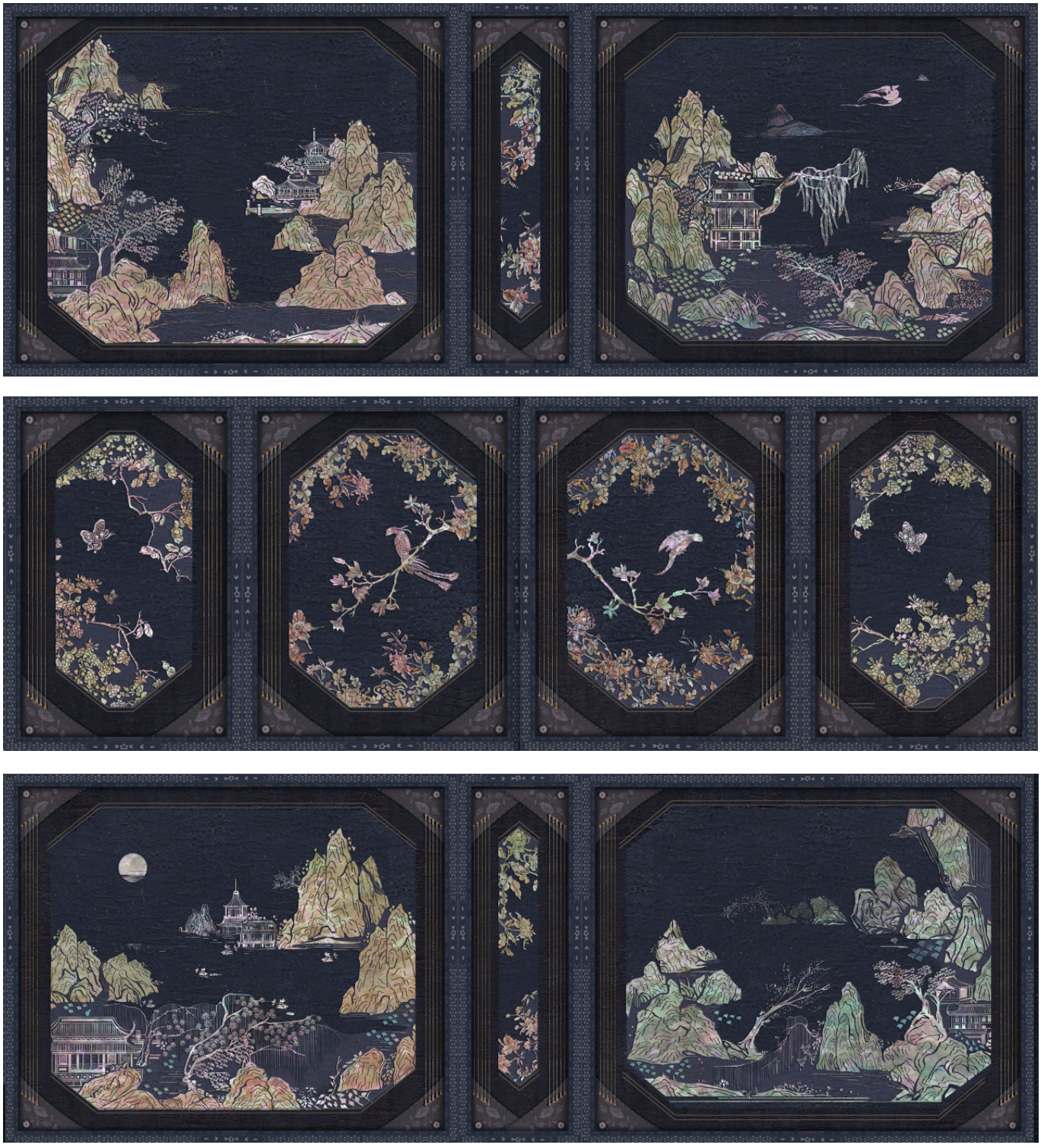
Therefore, since the day humans started learning to understand the world and the environment, they have always been seeking and exploring a way of life that can adapt to the changing environment and fully meet their own needs, rather than choosing to run counter to the world rigidly.

Acknowledgments I would like to express my gratitude to Supervisor Xiang Yong for his dedicated teaching in the theoretical knowledge of the cultural and creative industry. During the half - semester of professional courses at Peking University, I systematically learned the theoretical framework and practical applications of the cultural and creative industry. Through classroom discussions with my classmates at Peking University and literature research, I further clarified the professional learning methods, application directions, and my personal future career plans. I am thankful to Supervisor Huang Jiancheng for his guidance and research in the field of visual design experience. In the second semester of my first - year postgraduate study, I participated in the “Happy Chinese New Year” project. Through the method of “tackling real - world topics in a virtual way”, I comprehensively learned the overall application methods of spatial design display and visual symbol design. This experience gave me a deeper understanding of the practice of visual design. I especially want to thank my main supervisor, Professor Wang Qijun. In my academic studies and daily life, Professor Wang has always provided me with meticulous care and guidance. From the urban economy and culture project in the first year to the thesis - writing course in the third year, Professor Wang’s rigorous academic attitude, upright character, and passionate dedication to academia have deeply inspired me. During the process of writing my thesis, Professor Wang devoted a great deal of effort. He provided detailed guidance in aspects such as the standardized application of the thesis format, the accurate indexing and annotation of literature, and the final polishing and translation of the thesis results. Especially during the translation process, Professor Wang helped me accurately grasp the differences between Chinese and English expressions to ensure the academic nature and readability of the thesis. His patience and rigor have made me deeply appreciate the rigor and sense of responsibility in academic research, and I have also benefited a great deal from his guidance in thesis writing. In the blink of an eye, this fulfilling and wonderful learning period is about to end. I am grateful to have met these four outstanding supervisors at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Their earnest teachings and selfless help will become precious treasures in my future academic and professional career. Here, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to all the supervisors once again!

individual works

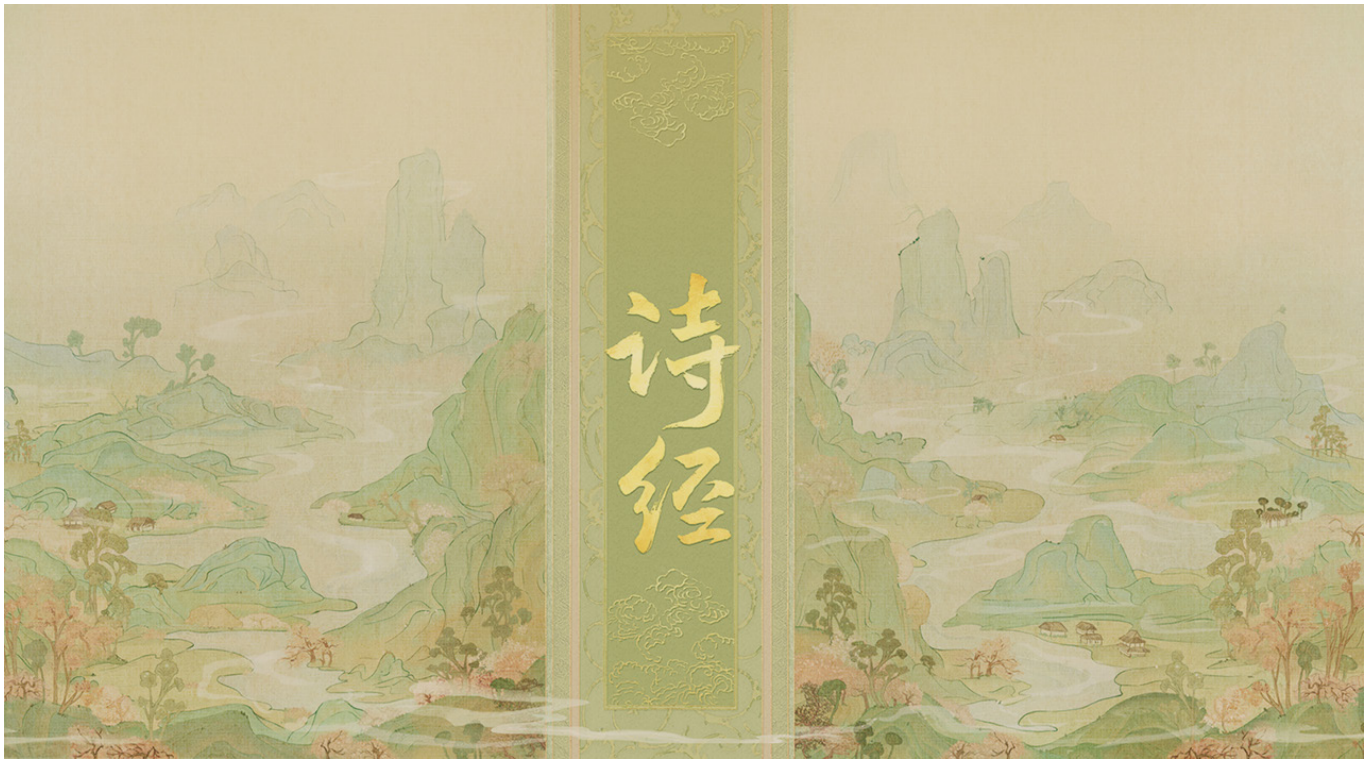






For the visual art design of the «Ode - Huang Zhong Da Lu» 2023 National Music Concert, «Huang Zhong Da Lu» refers to the first two tones among the twelve musical scales in ancient Chinese music. The concert takes the names of the twelve musical scales as its theme and showcases the beauty of Chinese traditional folk music through cross - border performances. In terms of the visual design for the folk music ensemble performance of *The Moon over the River on a Spring Night*, the texture of the ancient intangible cultural heritage traditional craftsmanship, lacquer inlay with mother - of - pearl, is employed to present the scenes, depicting the resplendent pavilions and towers in the night of the prosperous Tang Dynasty. The visual packaging uses patterns from the Tang Dynasty and incorporates the feature of the pipa as the main musical instrument, decorated with strings.

This picture introduces the brand design related to *China in Classics*. *China in Classics* was broadcast on CCTV-1 in 2023. It tells the story of Mao Heng writing *The Ancient Explanation and Transmission* for *The Book of Songs* and then passing *The Book of Songs* on to Mao Chang. *The Book of Songs*, as a collection of poems from the Pre-Qin period, reflects simple folk customs and features romantic and plain verses. Therefore, the main visual design draws inspiration from the style of ancient paintings like *Nymph of the Luo River* from the Wei and Jin Dynasties, focusing on landscapes with elegant and soft lines.





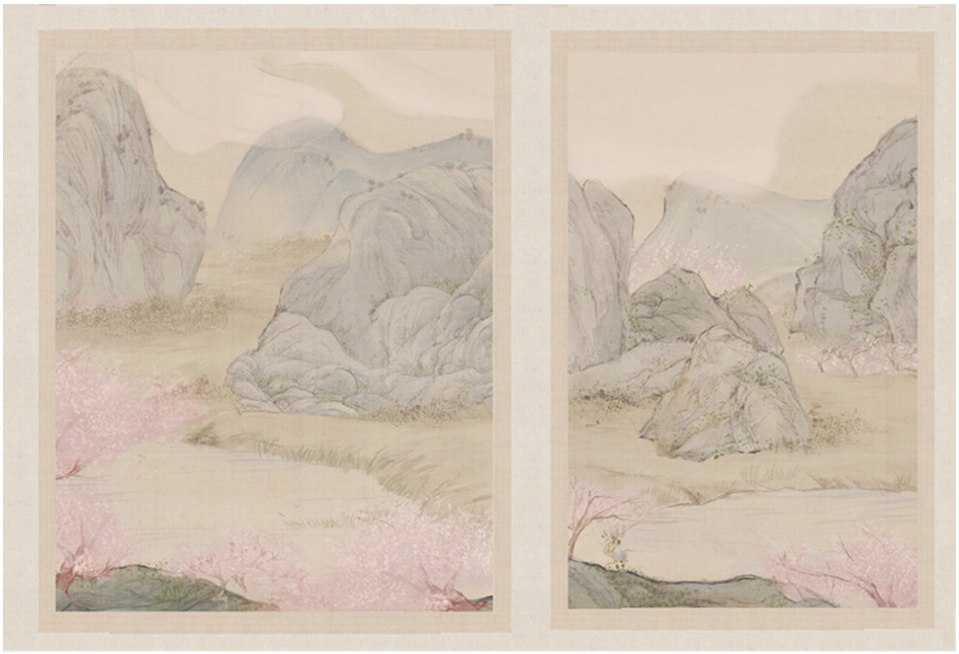




This picture is still an introduction to the brand design related to *China in Classics*. It mentions that *Commentaries on the Waterways Classic* is a famous ancient Chinese geographical work, consisting of forty volumes, written by Li Daoyuan in the late Northern Wei Dynasty. The related design and creation are based on the script and the main connotations of *Commentaries on the Waterways Classic*, mainly focusing on the drawing of waterway maps, presenting the texture of ancient paintings.











Creation of illustrations for long scrolls of landscape paintings







Chinese lacquerware
The perfect combination of luxury and cost

Qijun Wang
DOI: 10.69954/SOA020203

Abstract: Chinese lacquerware has a long history. As early as in the Hemudu culture of the

Neolithic Age, it had already appeared. At that time, the production of lacquerware was simple, mainly daily necessities, and the lacquer colors were mostly red and black. During the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, the lacquerware craftsmanship improved somewhat, and processes such as pasting gold foil and inlaying turquoise appeared. In the Warring States period, lacquerware entered all fields of life, and new processes such as laminated body appeared. In the Qin and Han dynasties, it reached its peak, and there were special departments for making lacquerware to serve the nobility. From the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Song Dynasty, the development of lacquerware was once slow, but the gold and silver flat relief in the Tang Dynasty and the carved lacquer craftsmanship in the Song Dynasty had high achievements. During the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, the manufacture of lacquerware flourished again, with diverse craftsmanship techniques. The characteristics of Chinese lacquerware are rich and diverse. It is shaped with wood or other materials and is made through lacquering. It has practical functions and appreciation value. Its decorative techniques are numerous, including painting, tracing gold, inlaying, etc., with rich colors and unrestrained lines. Lacquerware has a wide range of types, including living utensils, religious ritual utensils, etc. Its products also have the characteristics of being lightweight and firm, durable, and having stable shapes.

Key words: lacquerware, laminated body, gold and silver flat relief, lacquering

Lacquerware production is a craft that reflects the traditional Chinese thought of the unity of nature and humanity. It is also a process of transforming natural objects into luxurious and beautiful utensils through the reconstruction of processing techniques. The processing of lacquerware is different from the processing of other materials in that the production and processing of lacquer products have the characteristics of many process links, complex craftsmanship, and long time-consuming. Moreover, due to the natural characteristics of lacquer, from lacquer collection and lacquer making to lacquering, it can only 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 lacquering, dozens to hundreds of layers of lacquer need to be applied repeatedly on the carcass. For each layer, it can only be applied after the lacquer layer is air-dried under specific temperature and humidity. The required time and labor cost are extremely high.

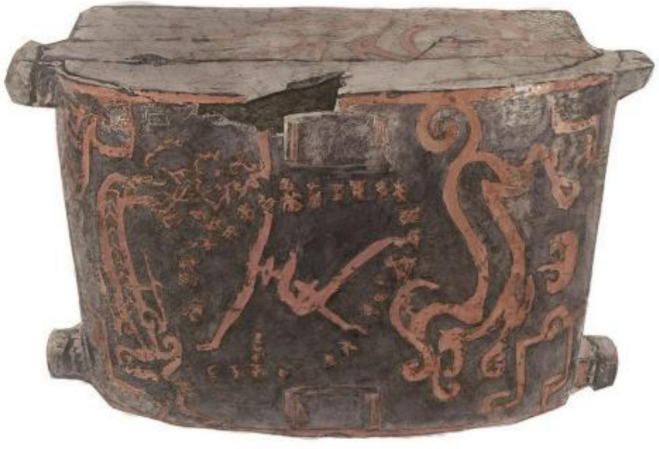
In addition to the high cost of making and processing lacquerware itself, some techniques in lacquerware, such as qiangjin (incised gold) and piled lacquer, seem simple but require superb skills and artistic background, as well as patience and time to achieve. In addition, precious materials such as gold and silver foil, gold and silver flat removal, inlaid pearl shells, gems, and ivory can all be applied in lacquerware products, which greatly increases the difficulty of making lacquerware products. A gorgeously decorated lacquerware product may involve multiple professional skills and the processing and combination of multiple materials from making the base to the final completion. Lacquerware and precious metals such as gold and silver, gems, etc., not only are their production materials very expensive, but also require experienced craftsmen to spend a lot of time carefully making to finally complete. It can be said that lacquerware is a very inclusive material that can integrate various decorative materials. However, for this reason, producers need to be proficient in the production and processing techniques of many different materials as well as have quite skillful and superb production skills. Only by combining the two can a perfect lacquerware product be presented. For example, for the famous Tianshui carved lacquerware, some representative works may take months or years to complete. The production involves multi-

ple trades such as carpentry, lacquerwork, stone carving, and inlaying, as well as hundreds of processes such as applying lacquer, tracing gold, and pasting silver.

Even with the most simplified approach, lacquerware decorated only by lacquering has a rather long actual production process and cycle. And this kind of lacquerware that combines luxury and high production costs does not have a magnificent appearance like gold, silver, and jade wares when completed. Instead, it appears elegant and low-key, truly reflecting the ideological realm of Taoism that "great ingenuity appears clumsy."

1. High-start lacquer craftsmanship

The history of Chinese lacquerware is long and has a rich and colorful development process. The history of Chinese lacquerware not only shows the exquisite skills of ancient craftsmen but also reflects the development of social culture and aesthetics in various periods. The Chinese character for "lacquer" vividly shows the process of tapping lacquer: there is a "wood" on the top, a "water" on the bottom, and a left and right stroke in the middle, representing the bamboo slices inserted into the trunk when tapping lacquer. The lacquer liquid of the lacquer tree is like water by the bamboo slices, and a bucket is placed below to collect the lacquer juice.



Lacquer-painted chest from Marquis Yi of Zeng's tomb, Warring States period

In the Neolithic Age, primitive people were surprised to find that the natural juice extracted from lacquer trees could be used for strengthening and repairing production tools due to its adhesiveness. Subsequently, people discovered that applying lacquer on the surface of wooden objects could give wood products a long-lasting protective film. According to Chinese archaeological findings, as early as on the surface ofNeolithic pottery jars, there was already the practice of applying lacquer. Wooden objects with lacquer decorations were also unearthed in the Yin Ruins in Anyang, Henan



Gilded lacquer statue of Bodhisattva

Province, showing the long history of lacquerware in China. Before making lacquerware, one generally needs to prepare the object to be initially coated with lacquer to determine the initial shape of the lacquerware, which is called the base.

In the early stage, the most common ones were wooden bases and a small number of bamboo bases. Later, with the improvement of craftsmanship, there were also gold and silver bases and porcelain bases. Different materials can be selected as the inner base according to the shape and purpose of the utensil.

In addition, there is also a kind of laminated fabric core. For the laminated fabric core, wood or clay is first used to make a vessel shape as an inner mold. Then, multiple layers of linen or silk are attached to the inner mold. Lacquer is applied layer by layer. After it dries and solidifies, the inner mold is removed, leaving the laminated fabric core. This is called the "bodiless method". This method can greatly reduce the weight of lacquerware and can be used to make large statues. Many Buddha statues adopt the method of laminated fabric core. It not only makes use of the stable texture characteristics of lacquerware and its ease of carving and coloring to create vivid Buddha statues, but also makes use of the anticorrosive and easy-to-preserve characteristics of lacquer products to ensure the integrity and stability of Buddha statues. The seated statue ofMonk Jianzhen made in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) in China adopts the method of laminated lacquer statue. The painted Buddha statue is 84 centimeters high. The eminent monk is wearing a kasaya, with his eyes closed, a smile on his lips, and his hands folded on his knees, showing the dharma appearance of the eminent monk at the time of his passing away. It is as real and vivid as a real person and has been enshrined until now. Because the Buddha statues made by the lacquer method are relatively lightweight and easy to move, it has become a very common method for making Buddhist statues.



Lacquer box with piled lacquer soul pattern, Western Han Dynasty during the reign of Emperor Wen

In ancient lacquerware, the "lacquer" is natural raw lacquer, which is raw lacquer collected from lacquer trees. "White as snow, red as blood, black as iron" refers to the process in which the natural lacquer changes from a liquid state to an oxidized and dried state, and its color changes from light to dark, finally forming a solid lacquer film. The lacquer liquid secreted by lacquer trees is a thick, grayish-white juice. When these collected juices are oxidized after coming into contact with air, they will turn chestnut-shell color. After being dried in the sun, they will become a shiny brown lacquer film. When brushed on objects, it is the original lacquerware. However, people are not satisfied with the natural black lacquer color, so they will add pigments to the lacquer. Black is the most common. In ancient times, there was such a saying: "All lacquers that do not mention colors are black." There are two methods for the ancients to make lacquer black. First, add soot to the lacquer. Although the color is black, there are residues. Second, add iron rust water to the lacquer. The urushiol and iron oxide have a color reaction. After mixing evenly, brush it on objects. It is jet-black like ink. The black lacquer obtained by this method is also called black lacquer or dark lacquer. However, there are other colors for ancient lacquer. Pigments added to lacquer are an indispensable main component for preparing colored lacquer. Since ancient times, several pigments that can be added to lacquer include silver vermilion, ochre, iron oxide red, indigo, and pine soot.



Lacquer screen painted with beasts and birds, Warring States period

The high production cost of lacquerware is caused by many factors. First of all, lacquer trees grow in special environments and cannot be widely planted everywhere like other tree species. Therefore, they are mostly produced in central China. The difficulty in planting directly leads to limited harvest. The quantity is small and the output is low. Moreover, it is not easy to pick. In ancient times, there was a saying that "it takes a thousand cuts within a hundred miles to obtain one catty of lacquer." Raw lacquer is toxic and can easily cause allergies in lacquer collectors, making the collection even more difficult.

Secondly, in terms of process cost: On one hand, the production process of lacquerware is complex. Each piece of lacquerware may take several weeks or even months to complete. This also means that the manpower, time and cost required for making lacquerware are relatively high. Regardless of the size of a piece of lacquerware, it needs to be coated more than a hundred times or even two hundred times. The layers are stacked on top of each other, and each layer merges, infiltrates, interlocks and blends with each other. After each coating, it needs to be dried in a shady room for more than three days. Exposure to sunlight or heat will definitely cause it to crack and it can only be air-dried. Calculated in this way, the production cycle of a single piece of lacquerware is at least one year or more. On the other hand, the technical requirements for making lacquerware are rela-

tively high, and unique lacquerware production skills need to be mastered. These techniques often require long-term learning and training, and the inheritance channels are limited. Due to the scarcity of technology, craftsmen can usually raise prices to reflect their professional skills and labor costs. Finally, the production of lacquerware may also involve materials such as gold, silver, gemstones, mother-of-pearl, etc. The cost of these materials themselves will also affect the cost of making lacquerware.



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

Lacquerware is an important category of practical utensils and handicrafts in ancient China. Archaeologists, through excavating and researching ancient ruins and tombs, not only discovered the existence of lacquerware but also inferred that humans began to use lacquer as the raw material for handicrafts very early. Although primitive people may have been aware of some basic uses of lacquer, their understanding of the chemical properties and production techniques of lacquer may be relatively limited. As time passed, the use and production techniques of lacquer gradually developed, forming a more complex and refined lacquerware culture. After the Xia Dynasty (approximately 2070 BC - approximately 1600 BC), the varieties of lacquerware increased. In the Shang Dynasty (approximately 1600 BC - 1046 BC), the production of lacquerware began to be particular, using thick wooden tires, and gold foil inlay appeared, which was the beginning of the gold foil inlay technique in the history of lacquer craftsmanship. During the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC - 771 BC), lacquer craftsmanship further developed. Painting and inlay became the main decorative techniques, reflecting hierarchy and order. A lacquer dou (a kind of container) from the Western Zhou Dynasty is not only composed of contrasting patterns of black and red lacquer, but also has a circle of mussel shell ornaments inlaid regularly on the belly of the dou. The colors are in sharp contrast, and the flowing colors of the mussel shells also appear very magnificent against the background of black and red lacquer. A major development and change of lacquerware in the Shang and Zhou Dynasties (1046 BC - 256 BC) is that it moved from ritual vessels to daily necessities. The practice of applying lacquer layers on the surface of utensils was widely used in many daily utensils. At this time, the patterns on the surface of lacquerware products were simple and the style was bold.



Square dou with phoenix pattern. Dou is a utensil for holding food.



Dou inlaid with mussel shells, early Western Zhou Dynasty

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770 BC - 221 BC), lacquer trees were widely planted and the application of lacquer became more and more extensive. At this time, lacquerware production became a specialized industry, and the fineness of lacquer craftsmanship was improved. In addition to the early wooden carcass, new carcass forms such as bamboo-woven carcass also appeared. During the Warring States period (475 BC - 221 BC), the lacquerware industry was included as an important source of economic income by the state, so it was very prosperous and the production scale of lacquerware was large. In addition to daily utensils, some large and exquisite lacquer artworks began to be made, and the pattern decoration on the surface of lacquerware became more detailed and complex. The early lacquerware shapes still came from bronzes. For example, a square-shaped lacquerware with phoenix bird patterns in the Warring States period had a square body and a high foot style, which was very similar to the bronze dou of the same period. Because lacquer trees were produced in the Chu region （in the middle of the China）, lacquerware from Chu was particularly representative, with very high production skills and aesthetic levels. A painted and lacquered tiger-seated double-bird drum unearthed from the Chu tomb at Wangshan in Jiangling in the north in 1965 is 87.8 centimeters long, 104.2 centimeters high, and 15.9 centimeters wide. It is made of wood with round carving. The drum base is two tigers lying on their backs facing each other. The two tigers are based on black lacquer and decorated with red lacquer cloud patterns. The tiger's shape has its head held high and its tail raised, with an imposing manner. There is a phoenix standing on the back of each tiger, looking up to the sky with its sharp beak slightly open, as if it is stretching its neck and chirping. The two phoenixes are based on black lacquer. The red lacquer lines outline the feather contour lines, and then different color blocks are filled in within the contour lines. The metal rings at the connected parts of the bird tails, together with the metal rings behind the heads of the two phoenixes, form a triangle for pulling and fixing the drum surface in the center. This lacquer drum in the shape of animals uses three craftsmanship methods of lacquer, carving, and painting to create a very practical and beautiful musical instrument.



Lacquer drum with two phoenixes

Another painted lacquer decorated wooden carved sika deer was unearthed from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng. It is a round carved wooden work from the early Warring States period. The deer is in a crouching position lying on the ground. The body is carved from a whole piece of wood. The head can rotate freely. The real antlers on the head are also decorated with black lacquer. The whole body of the deer is based on black lacquer. Yellow lacquer is used to depict melon seed-shaped dotted patterns on the deer's body. The eye sockets, lips, and nostrils of the deer are painted with bright red thick lacquer. There is a small square opening at the tail of the deer. It is speculated that it may be used to insert the upper component. Obviously, the deer body is the base of a certain utensil. It is beautified by painting and lacquer



Painted sika deer



Painted mandarin duck dou

painting. At the same time, the lacquer layer is also used to protect the wooden carving. Another painted mandarin duck dou (a kind of food container) from the Warring States period is also made of wood. It is composed of a deep plate with a cover, a thin handle, and a flared base joined by tenons. The cover and the plate are fastened with a female-male opening. The inside is oval. When the outside cover and the plate are fastened, it presents the image of a mandarin duck bird lying quietly with its head turned back and resting on its wings. The mandarin duck's wings are closed, its claws are curled, and the end of its tail is slightly upturned. The round bird image, head, body, wings, feet, and tail are all treated with bas-relief.

The carving is fine and the image is vivid. The handle and the base are made of whole wood. There is a convex ridge in the middle of the handle. The flared base is relatively high and hollow. The surface of the utensil is based on black lacquer. On it, red, gold, yellow and other colors are used to paint feather patterns. On both sides of the tail are two symmetrical phoenixes looking back. On the handle and base of the dou are painted curling cloud patterns and interlocking cloud patterns. The entire painted mandarin duck dou is 25.5 centimeters high and the diameter of the plate is 18.2 centimeters. It is not a large lacquer ware. But because of this, both the painting and carving are very fine. Although the patterns are simple, they are very smooth and vivid. It is a practical utensil and also a display handicraft.

In the Qin Dynasty (221 BC - 207 BC), lacquer was widely used as an important economic resource. The flesh color on the faces of the Terracotta Army was also decorated with a base of lacquer. The lacquer craftsmanship of the Qin Dynasty inherited the legacy of the Warring States period but became more standardized. The "marking of craftsmen's names on products" system emerged, which meant that the makers of artifacts had to engrave their names on the artifacts to facilitate the inspection of product quality by managers and ensure traceability of quality responsibilities, thus improving product quality. The Qin Dynasty advocated black, so the most representative lacquerware was black-based with red patterns. Common patterns were various variants of divine bird patterns.



Meng with deformed bird pattern, Qin Dynasty



Ear cup with bird pattern, Qin Dynasty

The lacquerware craft in the Han Dynasty (202 BC - 220 AD) further developed on the basis of inheriting traditions. After continuous development in previous dynasties, the lacquerware production process was relatively mature. Therefore, it presented characteristics of large production scale, complete varieties, and exquisite craftsmanship. Moreover, the production areas of lacquerware were also more exten-

sive. The Han Dynasty was the heyday of lacquerware. The varieties of lacquerware further increased, and a variety of new craft techniques were created, such as multi-colored, needle engraving, copper buckles, gold foil pasting, tortoiseshell pieces pasting, inlaying, and piled lacquer. The lacquerware craft of the Han Dynasty reached its peak and penetrated every corner of life. A large number of sets of daily-use lacquerware appeared.



Painted lacquer pot with cloud pattern, Western Han Dynasty

The lacquerware unearthed from Mawangdui was unearthed in Changsha City, Hunan Province in 1972. It is lacquerware from the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC - 8 BC). The Mawangdui Han Tombs are the tombs of Li Cang, the prime minister of Changsha State in the Western Han Dynasty and the marquis of Dai. More than 700 exquisite lacquerwares were unearthed. These lacquerwares are famous for their exquisite craftsmanship and preservation state. The craftsmanship is complicated. It can be said to represent the superb skills of lacquerware production in the Han Dynasty and show the glorious achievements of the lacquerware industry in the Han Dynasty. The types of lacquerwares are rich, including tripods, boxes, pots, fang, zhi, ear cups, plates, cosmetic boxes, etc. The number of ear cups accounts for more than half. The carcass of lacquerware is mainly made of wood, a small amount of bamboo, and some are made of laminated carcass. The decorative patterns are mainly geometric patterns, and also include dragon and phoenix patterns and grass patterns. The carcass of the lacquerware unearthed from Mawangdui is exquisitely made and the lacquer layer is uniform, showing superb skills. In addition to the curved and continuous cloud-like decorative patterns, the most representative lacquer plate also depicts the images of four cats. The three-character inscription “Please enjoy your meal” is written in the food plate, and the five-character inscription “Nine liters, the family of the marquis of Dai” is written at the bottom of the plate. It not only indicates its use and origin but also vividly depicts the image of cats. In addition, some lacquerwares also have branded stamps, such as “Made in Chengshi grass” and “Made in Chengshi full”. These stamps may be marks of the place of origin or production workshop of the made lacquerware.

On some lacquer wares, the needle engraving technique is used. That is, patterns are carved on the undried lacquer film with awls or needles. This technique had emerged in the Warring States Period and was further developed in the Han Dynasty. Due to the preservation conditions of the Mawangdui Han Tomb reaching constant temperature, constant humidity, oxygen deficiency, and sterile conditions, many lacquer wares have been extremely well protected. Although these lacquer wares have gone through more than two thousand years, they can still remain shiny after being unearthed, just like their appearance when they were first completed. Among the lacquer wares unearthed from the Mawangdui Han Tomb, there is a cloud-pattern lacquer tripod. When it was taken out during archaeological excavation and the tripod cover was opened, it was found that there was soup and lotus root slices inside the tripod. These lotus root slices were still clearly distinguishable after being soaked for more than 2, 100 years, but they dissolved soon after being The prosperity of economy and culture and the strength of national power in the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907) also directly promoted the development of lacquerware craftsman-



Lacquer tripod with cloud pattern, Western Han Dynasty

ship. Lacquerware products made great progress in both technology and plastic arts. In particular,the prevalence of gold and silver “pingtuo”, the development of mother-of-pearl inlay, and carved lacquerware with red lacquer also began to appear. In addition to more exquisite decoration, another major feature of Tang Dynasty lacquerware is its wide application, which has developed further compared with previous dynasties.

In terms of technology, the gold and silver pingtuo process was widely used at this time. This is a technological technique that combines lacquer painting and metal inlay. As early as the Shang Dynasty, people had already tried to decorate lacquerware with gold and silver foil appliqués. After continuous application and experimentation for a long time, mature gold and silver pingtuo skills were formed in the Tang Dynasty. Gold and silver pingtuo is a technological technique that combines lacquer painting and metal inlay and is a famous decorative technique for utensils in ancient China.

Artisans made gold and silver into foil sheets. They pasted honeysuckle flower sheets with various processed patterns on the surface of lacquerware, then applied two or three layers of lacquer. After the lacquer dried, they carried out fine polishing to reveal the honeysuckle flower sheets under the lacquer layer, forming the “gold and silver pingtuo” technique. The gold and silver patterns formed by this decorative method can be on the same plane as the lacquer bottom or can be higher than the lacquer bottom to form a three-dimensional pattern effect. In the underground palace ofFamen Temple in the Tang Dynasty, artifacts decorated with pingtuo technology have been unearthed. Moreover, due to the development ofporcelain, in the Tang Dynasty, there also appeared a decorative form of secret color porcelain gold and silver pingtuo lacquer, which combined the decoration of lacquer with more artifacts ofdifferent materials. In addition to being combined with porcelain artifacts, it is also combined with artifacts of other metal materials. For example, using the excellent adhesive property of lacquer as a decorative material on the back of bronze mirrors, and inlaying mother-of-pearl and gold and silver decorations on the lacquer layer. In addition, lacquer craftsmanship is also widely used in the production of musical instruments. Now, many institutions including the Palace Museum in China cherish Tang Dynasty guqins. Most of these guqins are made of wood with an external lacquer layer, and mother-of-pearl and gold and silver decorations are added to the lacquer layer. They have been preserved to this day because of the stable characteristics and excellent anti-corrosion properties of lacquer materials.



Secret color porcelain flat inlaid lacquer bowl, Tang Dynasty



Jiuxiao Huanpei Qin, Tang Dynasty

The Song Dynasty (960 - 1279) and Yuan Dynasty (1271 - 1368) periods saw lacquerware mainly in single colors, but many highly decorated lacquerwares were also unearthed. In particular, the carved lacquer craftsmanship of the Yuan Dynasty had a profound influence on the Ming and Qing dynasties that followed. The characteristic of the lacquer layer of objects in the Yuan Dynasty is that the piled lacquer is relatively thick, and then the decorative patterns are carved with a knife. After the Yuan Dynasty, the production scale of lacquerware continued to expand. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, both the production scale and processing techniques of lacquerware production had further development. Various places emerged with their own unique lacquerware processing techniques, such as carved lacquer in Beijing, inlaid mother-of-pearl in Yangzhou, bodiless lacquerware in Fujian, etc., each with its own characteristics.



Shen's bodiless lacquer peach plate, Qing Dynasty

The Yuan Dynasty is an important period for the development of Chinese lacquerware craftsmanship. In particular, the carved lacquer craftsmanship achieved brilliant achievements.

During this period, a group of famous lacquerware makers with outstanding skills emerged, such as Zhang Cheng. Zhang Cheng is a carved lacquerware craftsman in the late Yuan Dynasty. He is from Xitang, Jiaxing, Zhejiang. He is not only good at carved lacquer craftsmanship, but also has achieved achievements that others cannot reach in techniques such as red carved lacquer and inlaid gold and silver. Especially, he is most famous for making red carved lacquerware. His works have thick lacquer coatings and smooth knife techniques. The patterns on the finished utensils do not show knife marks. He often engraves the inscription "Made by Zhang Cheng" in the hidden parts of the utensil.

2. Superb lacquer processing technology.

The craft of carved lacquer emerged as early as the Tang Dynasty and matured in the Yuan Dynasty. Particularly represented by Zhang Cheng's carved lacquerware, it had reached a very high technological level. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, carved lacquer was used as a special supply of royal lacquerware, and was specially produced and processed by the royal family. As a result, the carved lacquerware of this period had very high quantity, quality and technological value. At this time, the types of carcasses for carved lacquerware were more diverse. In addition to the traditional wooden carcass and bamboo carcass, there were also many materials such as porcelain carcass, metal carcass and grey carcass. When making it, first apply lacquer on the carcass. After applying one layer, let it dry and then apply another layer. During the drying period of the lacquer layer, pay attention to the humidity and temperature of the air. For objects to be carved with lacquer, generally the lacquer layer is relatively thick, with at least dozens of layers and as many as three to five hundred layers. After the lacquer layer is painted, first design the image on the surface of the lacquer layer, and then use a knife to carve to form relief-like patterns. Finally, polish the patterns. Carved lacquer can be divided into many varieties according to the different colors of carved lacquer.



Porcelain-bodied carved red flower water dropper

Using natural lacquer, vermilion lacquer is the most common. There are also techniques for carving with other colored lacquers, such as picking yellow, picking green, and picking rhinoceros horn.



Gilt copper high-foot bowl with baby play pattern

Carved red lacquer, also known as piled vermilion or carved red lacquerware. It is one of the most important traditional Chinese lacquerware techniques. Its history can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty. In "Xiushi Lu - Kunji - Carving and Engraving Tenth - Carved Red Lacquer," written by Huang Cheng of the Ming Dynasty, it is written: "Carved red lacquer is carved red lacquerware.... The products of the Song and Yuan dynasties have clear hidden edges, smooth and rounded reliefs, and are exquisitely delicate." It often uses wood ash or metal as the base. Layers of red lacquer are applied on the base. When it is semi-dry, a draft is drawn, and then patterns are carved. The decorative themes of carved red lacquer include landscapes, figures, flowers, birds and beasts, auspicious patterns, etc., which are rich in strong traditional cultural characteristics. In addition to being used as process ornaments, carved red lacquerware is also often used in daily necessities, stationery supplies, furniture and religious ceremonial utensils. Carved yellow lacquer is carved yellow lacquerware. Carved green lacquer is carved green lacquerware. For carved polychrome lacquerware, when applying lacquer, multiple different colors of lacquer layers can be applied on different layers. When carving, carving can be done on different lacquer layers, finally forming a colorful lacquerware appearance. Among these, carved rhinoceros horn pattern lacquerware is the most representative.

Tixi is also a technique in traditional Chinese lacquerware craftsmanship. Its method is basically the same as that of Tihong. The difference is that Tixi is made of alternating layers of red, black, or vermilion, black, and red lacquer.



Lacquer plate with painting of Post-Red Cliff Ode, Southern Song Dynasty

Therefore, the cross-section of the lacquer layer formed by the knife edge after carving presents a two-color line image of alternating black and red, very much like the cross-section of a rhinoceros horn, and hence gets its name. Lacquerware carved using the Tixi technique can present a black and red alternating effect in its patterns, which is very elegant. Therefore, its carvings are mostly concentrated on simple and atmospheric patterns such as cloud patterns and flower patterns, highlighting the classical and elegant style of utensils.



Lacquer vase with carved red flower pattern, Yuan Dynasty

One notable characteristic of the carved lacquerware technique is the distinct layering of the lacquer. Each layer of lacquer can be carved into different patterns or textures, creating

rich visual effects. After the carving is completed, different colors can be applied to the lacquer surfaces of different layers to enhance the contrast and visual impact of the patterns. The carved lacquerware technique is known for its fine carving, rich layering, and vivid color contrast. It not only requires craftsmen to possess superb skills but also demands patience and a meticulous work attitude. In order to increase the color variation of lacquerware patterns and highlight the pattern image, there are two types of lacquerware derived from several previous processing techniques. One, which increases the planar pattern effect, is called carved and inlaid lacquerware. The other, a technique that increases the three-dimensional pattern effect, is called piled lacquerware.



Lacquer box with carved rhinoceros pattern

The name of carved and inlaid lacquerware was first seen in "Gongbu Changku Xuzhi" by He Shijin in the late Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644). The carving and inlaying technique was popular in the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1644 - 1911) and became a common name in the antique industry in the 20th century. The method is to carve intaglio patterns on the surface of lacquerware, then fill them with colored lacquer and smooth them. Draw intaglio lines on the patterns and fill gold in the lines. There are different production methods of carved and inlaid lacquerware. Some are real carving and inlaying, that is, carving intaglio patterns and then filling in colored lacquer and then gilding; some use painting instead of carving and inlaying, and then gilding after painting; some are partly carved and inlaid and partly painted. The two methods are applied simultaneously and finally gilding. The technique of piled lacquer appeared as early as the Han Dynasty (202 BC - 220 AD). Its characteristic is to use lacquer putty and lacquer to pile up patterns and create a three-dimensional decorative effect. It is a very ancient lacquerware decorative technique. The piled lacquer process usually involves applying a layer of lacquer first and then sticking a layer of charcoal powder to thicken layer by layer, or piling up lacquer layer by layer. In the process of piled lacquer, sometimes it needs to be polished and sometimes it needs to be colored to form a three-dimensional pattern. After piling up is completed, the surface is polished to make it smooth. Also creating a protruding pattern effect on the surface of utensils, carved lacquer is carving and piled lacquer is molding. It makes lacquer painting break through the limitation ofplane, increase the factor of sculpture and also enhance the visual effect.



Polishing lacquerware



Painting lacquer on lacquerware



Carving patterns on the surface of lacquerware with draft prepared

In addition to carved lacquerware, there is also a practice of directly painting decorative patterns on the surface of lacquerware, called painted lacquer. According to different techniques, it can be divided into two techniques: painted lacquer and painted oil. Painted lacquer is to use various colored lacquers to depict patterns on a plain lacquer ground. Painted oil, also known as painted brocade, uses tung oil instead of lacquer and mixes various bright colors to draw patterns. Painted lacquerware has a long history and can be traced back to the pre-Qin period. At that time, all lacquerware was painted with colored lacquer. Since the appearance of oil colors on lacquerware in the Han Dynasty, the use of oil colors has been increasing day by day, making the colors of lacquerware more gorgeous and rich. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the use of oil colors on lacquerware was quite common. Painted lacquerware 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 lacquerware, cut summer cloth according to the size of the carcass and paste it on the wooden carcass with wheat lacquer. Then a coating needs to be applied to the lacquerware. In jargon, it is called "lacquer base". After brushing with putty made of raw lacquer and various seasonings, lacquer materials are applied to the carcass, and then polished and air-dried to form plain lacquerware. Finally, craftsmen use various colored lacquers to depict patterns on the plain lacquer ground. Painted oil uses tung oil instead of lacquer and mixes various bright colors to draw patterns.

The patterns and designs ofpainted lacquer are all drawn by craftsmen. Therefore, 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 colors can also make various pattern designs colorful and prominent. It can be used together with other decorative techniques such as carved lacquer, or all painted lacquer can be used to make colorful patterns.



Lacquer box painted with double butterflies, Qing Dynasty

In the processing technology of lacquerware, there is also a special method called tracing in gold. The characteristic of tracing in gold lies in decorating lacquerware with gold color. It is usually combined with black or red primer. The patterns of gold-traced lacquerware are completely covered with gold, so the finished product is resplendent and extremely magnificent. The practice of gold-traced lacquerware had already appeared as early as the Warring States Period. In the Sui and Tang Dynasties, it was also introduced to Japan and had a profound influence on the development of Japanese lacquerware. "Xiushi Lu" written by Huang Cheng of the Ming Dynasty describes the technique of gold-traced lacquerware: "Tracing in gold, also known as mud gold painted lacquer, is pure gold flower patterns. Red ground and black texture are both suitable. Its patterns include landscapes, feathers, flowers and fruits, figures and stories, etc.; and fine hooking is yang, sparse drawing is yin, either in black or with colored gold images." The production process of gold-traced lacquer is also to first apply lacquer on the polished plain body. Either red lacquer or black lacquer can be used. This layer of lacquer is called topcoat lacquer. After the lacquer layer reaches the desired thickness, it is dried and polished to make the surface polished and bright. Then, use transparent lacquer to mix colored lacquer. Thinly trace patterns on the surface of lacquerware, and then put it in a greenhouse. When the lacquer is about to dry, use a silk cotton ball to apply the finest gold powder



Color painting and gilding



Color paintings in Dehui Hall



Lacquer plate with carved yellow dragon and phoenix pattern, Ming Dynasty

or silver powder on the patterns to make the entire pattern appear golden or silver. On this basis, there is also a gold-traced method in which a material called gold glue lacquer is used to first draw patterns on the finished lacquer ground, and while the gold glue lacquer is not completely dry, gold foil or gold powder is stuck on. This method can make the golden patterns present a three-dimensional effect and can also be combined with colored painting. That is, on the basis of gold tracing, patterns are painted with various colors. In addition, according to needs, mica mother-of-pearl, gold sand, rolled gold, mud gold, fine gold, etc. can also be decorated on gold-traced lacquerware at the same time to increase its artistic value and ornamental value. The gold-traced technique can obtain all-gold and silver decorative effects, so it is also used in architectural decoration and becomes a unique architectural colored painting. Especially yellow is the exclusive color for the royal family. Therefore, gold-decorated colored paintings have also become a high-level and high-specification practice and are exclusively used by the royal family.

Lacquerware is a very important craft technology in the history of Chinese arts and crafts. There are also a considerable number of exquisitely made lacquerware relics. At the same time, the changes in the production and manufacturing technology of lacquerware also occupy an important position in the history of Chinese science and technology. It not only reflects the progress of ancient Chinese chemical technology and material science but also shows the exquisite achievements of the combination of handicraft technology and scientific processing technology. The production of lacquerware involves the collection, processing, and application of raw lacquer. As a natural resin coating, the use and processing of raw lacquer not only involve lacquerware as a material but also involve the combined application of various materials such as wood, bamboo, metal, mother-of-pearl, and gemstones. The selection and treatment of these materials show the ancient understanding and application of different material properties. The production process of lacquerware includes various techniques such as lacquering, painting, inlaying, and carving. The innovation and development of these technologies reflect the high level of handicraft technology and are also the result of the in-depth development of human material science. Lacquerware had extensive uses in ancient society. Moreover, it was not only cherished domestically but also spread to other regions through trade routes such as the Silk Road and had a profound impact on East Asian and Southeast Asian countries.

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Wall, Public Sphere and Chinese Architecture ——Starting from Shenzhen Dafen Art Museum

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Public sphere, as defined by Jurgen Habermas, refers to a field of citizen discourse independent of individuals and the state, which reflects the common interests of a civil society1.Since Jurgen Habermas's theory was introduced into China in the 1990s, where China's public sphere is has become an important issue in discussions in disciplines such as history, sociology, and political science. This article attempts to contribute to this discussion through a case study of a special element of architecture - the wall. However, the issue that the author focuses on here is not whether there is a public sphere in China, but how it becomes a competitive arena for various social forces to compete for the right to speak. These competitions are manifested on the wall as an artificial spatial boundary, a medium that can be used for expression, and therefore also as a spatial resource of the city. The role played by the wall in Chinese history, especially in the history of the twentieth century, can provide an excellent annotation for people to understand the fate of China's 'public sphere.' And the starting point of this article's research is the author's observation of Shenzhen Dafen Art Museum in China.

1.Designed by URBANUS architects, the Dafen Art Museum is located in the center of Dafen Village, Buji Town, Longgang District, Shenzhen, China. In recent years, Dafen Village has become famous at home and abroad due to the reproduction and marketing of oil paintings by local painters living there. At the same time, it has also become a successful case of rural industrial transformation in China. To further enhance the cultural level of the village park, the local government has invested nearly 100 million yuan to build this unique-shaped art palace with an area of 17,000 square meters. The building has three floors in total. The first floor faces the village square and is a place for oil painting exhibitions and sales envisioned by architects. The second floor is a standard art museum occupying half of the total area. It is connected to the square by a ramp. The third floor is a roof garden. On this floor, there are some cube-shaped boxes that are either daylighting shafts for the exhibition halls on the second floor or rentable art studios and coffee houses. The alleys in the middle are passages connecting different blocks of the village, allowing children going to and from school and villagers going shopping on the street to stay in this roof garden.

Since its completion in 2007, Dafen Art Museum has received high praise from the architectural industry and social media. Among the many awards won by this design is the 'Best Architecture in China' award granted by Business Week/China and Architectural Record magazine in May 2008. In December of the same year, it was also nominated for the 'China Architecture Media Award' by Southern Metropolis Daily. The nominator, Professor Rao Xiaojun, dean of the School of Architecture of Shenzhen University, highly praised the multiple functions of this building and its positive role in improving the living and cultural quality of the entire community. He said 2:

This project has strong practical social significance. Dafen Village has formed a special industrial background with its production and sales of oil painting reproductions. As a government public facility, the art museum attempts to facilitate the intervention of contemporary art from one aspect. The local government wants to adjust the surrounding urban context through this public facility. Functionally, it mixes different functions such as art museums, galleries, businesses, and rentable studios into a whole, and mixes daily life, artistic activities, and commercial facilities into a new cultural industry base.

In fact, the Dafen Art Museum not only has a rather comprehensive functional layout, but its exterior wall design is also highly creative. Except for the west wall that serves as the entrance, some rectangular or square 'patterns' are obliquely arranged on the other exterior walls. According to the architect, these 'patterns' are derived from the building base on the map of Dafen Village. They are the 'projection' of the historical space of the village on this art museum. The architect also envisions that local artists can use these square frames as picture frames and display their works in them, adding the final touch to the final completion of the building 3.

The wall design concept of the Dafen Art Museum is worthy

of attention because it not only serves as a boundary dividing the internal and external spaces and separating the art exhibition venue from the external village, but also is a medium for local artists to display and express themselves. In the author's opinion, to understand the unique social significance of this wall, it is necessary to understand the relationship between walls and the social development and urban visual culture of modern China. Specifically, it is the utilization, competition, and control of various social forces over walls as a medium-like carrier, public domain, and spatial resource.



Dafen Art Museum (provided by URBANUS)

2.Walls in Chinese architecture have various forms, such as courtyard walls, lane walls, city walls, and even the 'national wall' - the Great Wall. Their basic meaning is to serve as boundaries separating the inside and outside of spaces. Therefore, the book 'Explanation of Names' 《释名》compiled during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25 - 220 AD) explains: 'A wall is a barrier, used to shield oneself.' The 'Shuowen Jiezi' 《说文解字》 compiled in the same period also quotes language from 'Zuo Zhuan' 《左传》to explain: 'People have walls to cover up evils.' These explanations undoubtedly emphasize the protective function of walls. However, unlike natural boundaries such as rivers and mountains, walls are man-made objects with artificial forms and interfaces, and thus they also have social characteristics. Mozi (476 or 480 BC - 390 or 420 BC) said, 'The height of palace walls is sufficient to distinguish the etiquette between men and women,' believing that the height of palace walls should be based on the standard of separating men and women as required by etiquette. Professor Chen Zhihua, an outstanding Chinese architectural historian of contemporary times, has noticed that high-walled enclosed deep mansions and chastity archways are two important architectural phenomena coexisting in Huizhou region during the Ming and Qing dynasties. He believes that the closed nature of local residences is not only due to the psychology of Huizhou merchants of not revealing their wealth, but also to prevent the contact and interaction between their families and outsiders when they are doing business outside 4. Today, in Chinese, 'high walls' and 'red walls' have become symbols of power and hierarchy.

In addition to its spacing function, the wall itself has an important characteristic in that it has a visible outer surface. Therefore, it can become a medium for expression like paper and canvas. In Chinese history, there are numerous examples of using walls as an expressive medium. Stories such as Zhang Sengyao's 'Adding Pupils to a Drawn Dragon' in the Liang Dynasty (502-557) and Li Bai's 'There is a scene before my eyes but I cannot describe it. Cui Hao has inscribed a poem above.' in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) are all related to this. In China, art forms generated by walls also include murals, wall sculptures, brick carvings, stone carvings, and engraved characters, and so on. The screen wall in traditional architecture is a special wall with expressive functions. In commercial buildings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there is also a shopfront design called 'pāi zi.' Its characteristic is to extend the building facade upward with a parapet wall and engrave or hang shop signs and advertisements on the parapet wall.

The Chen Clan Ancestral Hall and Academy in Guangzhou, completed in 1894 (the 20th year of the Guangxu reign of the Qing Dynasty), is an excellent example that fully embodies the medium nature of Chinese architecture. Its decorations adopt stone carvings, brick carvings, wood carvings, pottery sculptures, lime sculptures, copper and iron castings, and colored paintings. The themes include auspicious patterns and historical stories, such as 'many sons, many blessings', 'Hehe Erxian (Two Immortals of Harmony and Union)', 'leading the pack', 'more than enough every year', 'three rams heralding spring', 'Guo Ziyi's birthday celebration', 'the Dragon King and the Eight Immortals paying homage to the Jade Emperor', 'banquet in the Peach and Plum Garden at night', 'returning home in glory', etc., fully conveying the life ideals of the Chen clan and also reflecting the regional and cultural particularities of architecture 5. This architectural complex also representatively shows that the way of expressing meaning in traditional Chinese architecture mainly depends not on differences in types but on iconic carvings and indexical characters decorated on the exterior of the structural body. Walter Benjamin said: 'Distraction and concentration are diametrically opposed.... Architecture represents an art form, and the public's acceptance of it can be achieved inadvertently.' 6 In fact, wall decorations and urban public art both have this characteristic.

When walls, as a medium, enter the public domain, they will be connected with state power. The content of wall decorations in traditional Chinese architecture usually includes prayers for a life of good fortune, prosperity, longevity, and happiness and praises for the natural environment, as well as the promotion of Confucian moral ethics and Buddhist and Taoist doctrines. These wall surfaces are the public image or face of the building owners. Therefore, it is hard to imagine that in traditional Chinese society where totalitarian control or the 'disciplinary and punitive' mechanism as described by

Michel Foucault is extremely developed, the people could or dared to express any dissatisfaction with state power on the wall surfaces. The 39th chapter of 'Water Margin', 'Song Jiang composes a rebellious poem at Xunyang Tower', is a story of causing trouble due to composing a poem in a public place. It can be said that the relationship between an autocratic society and public walls is the same as its relationship with other public media - that is, monopoly.

The competition for walls has endowed it with richer visual cultural connotations in modern China than in any previous period. For example, in the history of collision and exchange between Chinese and Western cultures, the style of building walls is often a manifestation of cultural identity. In the discourse of nationalism, the Great Wall - a special wall - is the symbol of the Chinese nation. In the discourse of the Chinese revolution 7, 'tuweizi' (a stockaded village with walls made of earth or bricks and stones) is a synonym for the strongholds of reactionary forces. Shi Lu, a modern Chinese artist, in his print 'Overthrow Feudalism' (1949), depicts peasant troops charging into the landlord's manor with high walls standing, which is a vivid manifestation of overthrowing the feudal system. Another artist, Yan Han, also uses the same symbolic technique in his print 'March on the Feudal Fortress' (1948). He even engraved the slogan 'Farmers have their own land' and the notice of 'Outline of the Chinese Land Law' on the wall in the middle ground of the picture, further emphasizing the occupation and utilization of walls by the peasant movement.

In the process of China's modernization, walls have also become the object of transformation due to their closed nature. The demolition of city walls and construction of roads that have been launched in various places since modern times are a complete negation of the shielding function of traditional city walls, fully reflecting what Joseph W. Esherick said: 'The victory of the new concept of economic development over the old understanding that emphasizes safety, and the transformation from controlling the circulation of people and goods to promoting this circulation' 8. In the controversy over the demolition and protection of Beijing's city walls after 1949, the main reasons of the demolition faction were also 'city walls are ancient fortifications and have now lost their functions', 'city walls are the relics of feudal emperors' and 'city walls hinder traffic and limit or hinder the development of cities' 9. It is no exaggeration to say that in the history of modern Chinese architecture, no other architectural element has the same important social and cultural associations as walls.

The revolutions that took place in modern and contemporary China were to a large extent mass movements that needed to educate, mobilize, and influence the people. Therefore, they most needed propaganda methods that could be close to the people and be easily accepted by the people. The media nature of walls was utilized by various mass movements, creating many 'arts' related to walls, such as slogans, murals, posters, propaganda paintings, wall newspapers, and even big-character posters. Compared with foreign and elitist urban sculptures, they are more convenient and easy to implement, so they have become the most popular 'public art' in modern China. The most important function of these new art forms is to transform a spatial resource into a political resource that can be used to serve politics. Suzhou during the period of the Republic of China (1911-1949) is such an example. In 1928, a tourist commented on its urban transformation like this10:

The most eye-catching ones are the white letters on the blue background on the wall and the red, blue, and white flags or bright blue and white flags on the roof; Furthermore, no matter where it is - teahouses, taverns, bathrooms, barber shops, or even brothels - in the past, places that hung the slogans 'Heavenly Officials bless the Three Great Stars' and 'Business prospers throughout the world, wealth reaches the Three Rivers' or 'Families celebrate the emperor's favor, longevity is abundant' have been replaced with the two maxims of 'Portrait of Mr. Sun Yat sen' and 'Comrades still need to work hard' left by his elders; Although one can still find phrases such as' singing and dancing in peace ',' feeling at home ', and' purple energy coming from the east ', they are still among the very few.

As a political resource, wall public art is inevitably subject to political intervention. In 1938, artist Zhong Ling wrote a huge slogan in Yan'an that read 'Workers, poor peasants, unite to fight for victory against Japan'. When writing the word 'worker', he felt that the strokes were too few and asymmetrical compared to the adjacent traditional Chinese character 'nong' (farmer). Therefore, he borrowed the writing style of traditional clerical script and wrote the word 'worker' in the shape of 'gong' （工） with two turns and 'ren' （人）with three strokes. During the Yan'an Rectification Movement in February 1942, Mao Zedong delivered a famous speech titled 'Oppose the Eight Elements of the Party'. When talking about the third crime of the Eight legged Communist Party of China, which is 'aimless and not looking at the target,' he mentioned this slogan, saying that it was deliberately not intended for the common people to read, and said, 'It is certain that this comrade was a student of ancient literati, but it is somewhat inexplicable that he had to write it on the walls of Yan'an during the Anti Japanese War'.11This famous story in the history of modern Chinese art illustrates that in the eyes of politicians, public art must be easily recognizable in form, and any individual artist's performance that goes against this requirement is not worth encouraging.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, more professional artists and art enthusiasts were sent to rural areas to participate in activities such as writing slogans and painting promotional murals. In early 1958, the famous painter Gu Yuan and 25 editors and painters from the People's Fine Arts Publishing House went to places such as Zunhua County in Hebei Province and Gaoyou County in Jiangsu Province

to paint murals in villages and communities. At the request of the Zunhua County Committee, Gu Yuan drew propaganda murals several meters to over ten meters long based on the slogans of the Great Leap Forward proposed by the county. Changli County in Hebei Province has also organized an art creation team mainly composed of art teachers, folk artists, and club backbones, with a total of more than 2000 people. In half a month, they created more than 65000 murals, becoming a famous 'mural county' in China12. A poem at that time further described the popularity and social function of murals: 'Socialist new murals, rooted in the new countryside. Farmers love new murals, and every village paints murals. Leap forward carriages, leap forward horses, and everywhere are leap forward paintings. New murals can speak and educate people's hearts towards lighthouses.' 13 The behavior of these artists and art enthusiasts is a manifestation of the state's occupation of the public sphere in rural society - these murals are not inside temples but on the exterior walls of buildings facing the street, and their themes are not religious deities and legendary stories, but illustrations of national policies. Therefore, whether in spatial form or content, they can be regarded as a revolution in Chinese mural tradition14.

Another large-scale use of walls in modern Chinese history is the 'big character poster'. It is a widely published text that does not require official approval or represent the will of those in power, making it a tool for free expression by the public. In order to facilitate public viewing, the prominent visual feature of big character posters is 'large', and they utilize public spaces, especially building walls, in their dissemination methods. The origin of big character posters can be traced back to the mourning activities of the people when Sun Yat sen passed away in 1925. At that time, the 'big character poster' wall composed of slogans and couplets became another important medium for different social groups and even individuals to express themselves spontaneously at Sun Yat sen's funeral, in addition to books and newspapers.

However, the proliferation and climax of big character posters undoubtedly occurred during the Cultural Revolution. On May 25, 1966, Nie Yuanzi, the secretary of the Philosophy Department Party Branch of Peking University, and others posted a big character poster on campus, attacking the main leaders of the University Work Department of the Beijing Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Peking University Party Committee. On June 1st, Mao Zedong decided to broadcast this big character poster to the whole country through the Central People's Broadcasting Station, praising it as 'the first Marxist Leninist big character poster in the country' and 'the manifesto of the Beijing Commune in the 1960s'. On August 9th, he also announced 16 regulations: 'We should fully use the forms of big character posters and debates to carry out loud speeches.' The big character poster quickly became ubiquitous throughout the country. Finally, at the first session of the Fifth National People's Congress held from February to March 1978, the 'four major conferences' - big voice, big release, big character newspaper and big debate were listed as 'great socialist democracy' and 'people's democratic rights' by the newly adopted Constitution of the People's Republic of China.

Due to the recognition of the highest leaders and the fact that its posting did not require special approval procedures, the big character poster made the wall the most shared spatial resource and 'public domain' in society during the Cultural Revolution. Shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution, this resource and field quickly became a battlefield for the competition between folk demands and national ideology, as reflected in the rise and fall of the 'Democracy Wall' in Xidan, Beijing. The wall was originally a 2-meter-high and 200 meter long wall on the northeast side of the intersection of Xidan Commercial Street and Chang'an Avenue, the most important east-west avenue in Beijing. Since November 1978, it has been used by civilians to post texts expressing their political views. In November of the following year, the Second Session of the Fifth National People's Congress made a resolution to ban it. On December 6th, the Beijing Municipal Revolutionary Committee issued a notice stipulating that except for posting big character posters in their own units, all big character posters must be gathered in Yuetan Park, and their real names and other information must be filled in. Posting big character posters on Xidan Wall and other places is prohibited. In February 1980, the Fifth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China believed that the Fourth National Congress did not play a positive role in safeguarding the people's democratic rights, but instead hindered the normal use of democratic rights by the people. In September of the same year, the third session of the fifth National People's Congress abolished the provision in Article 45 of the Constitution that citizens have the right to use loudspeakers, big release, debates, and large character posters15. The wall, as a medium for expressing different political views, has lost its legitimacy in China as a result.

Instead of big character posters, there are two other wall media - wall posters and advertisements, whose viewing methods, like other urban public art, aim to indirectly make the public feel 'unintentionally'. Posters are images and text published by the government or officially recognized. Its appearance in urban and rural public spaces in China should have been no later than 1958 when artists went to rural Hebei to paint murals. After the reform and opening up, the most famous official wall poster was probably established by the Propaganda Department of the Shenzhen Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China, featuring a huge portrait of Deng Xiaoping with the theme of 'Adhering to the Party's Basic Line for One Hundred Years without wavering'. This is an independent wall with an area of 300 square meters, located at the intersection of Shennan Road and Hongling Road in a square with an area of about 14000 square meters 16. It continues the traditional Chinese architecture of shadow walls, highlighting the public and commemorative nature of

the images. More wall posters are either attached to buildings or independent along the street, but they are mostly designed with rainproof glass covers, eaves, and lighting facilities. They provide safety guarantees for display content and convenient conditions for visitors, fully demonstrating the recognition and support of government departments.

Commercial advertising was popular in various commercial cities in China during the first half of the 20th century. But since the 1950s, with the government's socialist transformation of industry and commerce, the planned economy replaced the market economy, and commercial advertisements aimed at market promotion disappeared from public spaces in China. Instead, political slogans, posters, and propaganda posters have been used. With the reform and opening up in the late 1970s and the revival of China's market economy, advertising also reappeared. On January 14, 1979, Ding Yunpeng, 38 years old from the advertising department of Shanghai Advertising Company, published an article titled 'Rectifying the Name of Advertising' in Wen Hui Bao (a famous newspaper), stating that advertising was not a 'capitalist business model' and publicly defending it. This article can be regarded as the first horn of the recovery of China's advertising industry, which quickly caused a nationwide response17.

The dissemination of advertisements depends on the medium. Today, in addition to radio, television and the Internet, the wall of a building is another important medium for advertising. Therefore, wall advertising has become one of the most important contents of China's urban visual culture. Its essence is to transform a space resource into a commercial resource.

The changes in the exterior wall of the Beijing Olympic Hotel, designed by Japan's Kumi Corporation and built in 1988, located opposite the National Library of China in Beijing, highlight this spatial competition. For this building, the author wrote in an introduction to the book '20th Century Chinese Architecture' in 1999 18:

The Beijing Olympic Hotel has a simple body shape and a color tone of blue-green. The facade of postmodernism style shows a classical meaning. The bottom two levels of public rooms form the base on the facade, while the guest room level serves as the wall and the protruding skylight forms the roof. The east and west facades are naturally divided into three sections: left, middle, and right, with windows and solid walls depending on the orientation of the guest rooms. The flat wall utilizes the sloping surface of the window at the end of the corridor to form two grooves on the east and west facades, clearly explaining the relationship between the blocks and the overall relationship is very organic. The pediment of the skylight is gambrel, which is also a traditional vocabulary in Western architecture. The upper notch is reminiscent of the broken pediment on the AT&T Building in New York designed by Philip Johnson. The exterior walls of the building are covered with blue reflective tiles and have standard unit divisions. Each unit has three color tone stripes, forming a horizontal line on the overall facade and implying the location of the floor, as well as the walls above and below the windows The design of the Olympic Hotel reminds people of a famous quote by Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki: 'The maturity of an architect can be seen from the details'.

Unfortunately, due to poor management and insolvency, the Olympic Hotel was auctioned off in 2003 and transformed into an office building, which was subsequently sublet to different owners. The advertisements currently covering the exterior walls of buildings include: 'China Foreign Exchange Building', 'Kyushu Business Hotel', 'Fujin Tian Restaurant', 'Xiangbin Restaurant, New Xiang Yue Seafood', 'Beijing Roast Duck', 'Zhongyuan Dajing Car Rental', 'Guangdong Tea Market', 'Four Seasons Hot Springs, Professional Foot Therapy', etc. These advertisements are a manifestation of the image of each enterprise, serving their own commercial interests, and the cost of this interest is the original pure and perfect appearance of the building.



Small Advertisements on the Streets of Beijing (Photo by Lai Delin)

Another phenomenon that fully reflects the current urban wall competition is the various 'small advertisements' posted on the streets of Chinese cities. The information spread by these small advertisements is mostly illegal activities such as engraving seals, obtaining certificates, issuing invoices, as well as ambiguous searches for friends and rentals. Their proliferation not only seriously affects the city's appearance, but also causes damage to public facilities, leading to being vividly referred to as 'urban psoriasis' by the general public. But strangely enough, many municipal departments have no intention of tracing the source and eradicating the crackdown

according to the contact information provided in the advertisement. They only rely on cleaners to scrape and clean, treating the symptoms rather than the root cause. Their governance efforts are vastly different from strictly prohibiting 'reactionary slogans' 19. How to deal with advertisements in cities and buildings actually reflects the attitude of urban authorities and property owners towards urban space and building environment, and also tests their ability to control both. These small advertisements seem to tell people that many walls in Chinese urban spaces, although not privately owned, are not legally considered 'public areas'. They seem to lack clear ownership and are in a state of 'three no's'. Local governments do not mind their infringement on the interests of the people (including various illegal constructions and behaviors that encroach on urban sidewalks), and only when they are used to challenge the ideology of the country, these 'public interest representatives' will use authoritarian means to re assert their 'sovereignty' over them.

Since the 1990s, the wall itself has also been a manifestation of the spatial competition in China's urban commercial development boom. The most famous case is the demolition of the south campus wall of Peking University in March 1993. When the school authorities decided to demolish the approximately 600 meters long south wall and convert it into a commercial street, a young student on campus was very radical and said, 'This is a great sadness. From now on, Peking University will no longer have a pure scholar.' However, the deputy secretary of the party committee responsible for real estate development at Peking University responded that the wall pushing was the result of Peking University's 'updating its mindset. According to media reports, whether one wishes it or not, the concept of an ivory tower will disappear here, and Peking University students, who are known for their emphasis on academia and politics, will become associated with a market economy. Wen Hui Bao (a famous newspaper) boldly asserted that 'Peking University bid farewell not only to a wall, but perhaps to an era of walls' 20. For architectural and urban historians, the demolition of the south wall of Peking University reproduced the history of the disintegration of the urban neighborhood system and the emergence of commercial streets in Bianliang, the capital city of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), due to the development of the market economy since the Sui Dynasty (581-618) and Tang Dynasty (618-907).

3.Symbolically, the initial rise of contemporary experimental art in China reflects a competition for walls - a public medium, specifically an exhibition space. In 1979, when a group of rebellious avant-garde artists' works were rejected by the National Art Museum of China as the official representative of the art world, they chose the museum's walls as the exhibition venue. This exhibition is called the 'Star Art Exhibition' 21. Since then, we have continuously seen contemporary Chinese artists' creations related to 'walls'. For example, Xu Bing's 'Ghost Beats the Wall' (1992) uses rubbings to transform the solidity of the Great Wall into flatness, turning outdoor brick and stone structures into indoor paper and ink installations, and turning a national symbol into a collection of private artists. Black, ink, and white paper not only reveal the oppressive feeling that the Great Wall brings to people, but also dissolve its sacred commemorative significance 22. For example, Song Dong's home is adjacent to the deep courtyard of a senior official. The tall wall reflects the identity and rank of this official, and also blocks all of his secrets from the outside world. Taking inspiration from classical Chinese novels, Song Dong's installation work 'Leaking Secrets' (1995) features a series of cloth bags hanging outside a high wall, with ice cubes symbolizing those 'secrets' placed inside. As time passed, the ice melted and the 'secret' was revealed, creating a strong contrast between the authority represented by the high wall and the emptiness revealed by the ice pack. This work not only questions hierarchy and state power, but also challenges the hegemony behind it. When people discover that the so-called 'secret' is just a pool of water, they cannot help but laugh at the seemingly mysterious high wall.

Currently, walls are also a forefront battlefield for conflicts between the government, real estate developers, homeowners, and residents, making them an important theme in contemporary Chinese art. The artist's vision is to carefully paint and sew on the walls of ancient buildings that have been violently demolished by real estate developers in Beijing, as if performing the final cosmetic surgery for a deceased relative to restore her rightful dignity. Zhang Dali said, 'Many things are happening in this city: demolition, construction, car accidents, sex, alcohol abuse, and pervasive violence... I chose these walls. They are the screens that project the city's performance.' His series of 'graffiti' works are his 'dialogue' with Beijing city, and he has also left his personal mark on the walls as a public domain 23. Huang Rui's work 'Zhanna' (2007) interprets the English pronunciation of 'China' as 'Zhanna', and vividly showcases the current image of China as a powerful and violent country due to rapid urban land development. In short, the works of these contemporary artists are all based on walls as the starting point of creation, expressing questioning and satire of power through different ways of dialogue with walls, and protesting against the damage caused by commercialism to various historical buildings and public property composed of walls.

In the history of modern Chinese architecture, the exterior walls of many public buildings are still a medium for expressing meaning, but the means of displaying meaning are mostly not the iconic carvings and indicative texts mentioned above, but the styles produced by symbolic elements, such as ethnic style, modernist style, postmodernism style, and European style. These styles undoubtedly embody the cultural ideals of homeowners. It is worth noting that this pursuit is not only about the initial style positioning of architectural design, but also includes the 'facade renovation' that changes the appearance of the building after completion. Facade renovation is

quite common in contemporary Chinese architecture and urban renewal movements, allowing homeowners to adjust their value orientation and regain architectural forms that conform to current aesthetics without making significant changes to the original structure. And the urban authorities are also using this means to rectify the city's appearance and redefine the city's identity and style.

In recent years, there are two concepts in Chinese architectural design that have had a significant impact on the exterior wall effect of buildings: the 'constructivist theory' and the 'skin theory'. They are design concepts indirectly derived from Western works or directly introduced by foreign architects. The former emphasizes the organic and perfect structure and materials, and opposes various additional meanings beyond architecture; The latter emphasizes the autonomy of building exterior walls independent of structural systems, allowing architects to break free from structural constraints and create imaginative and personalized exterior walls. Although the two concepts have different attitudes towards the issue of architectural symbolism, they both adhere to the autonomy of architecture and the architect's understanding and control of the work, opposing users' additions and modifications to the design. Like a work of art, the best condition for such buildings is usually after completion and before use 24.

4.The exterior walls of the Dafen Art Museum emphasize the abstract features of flat composition, rather than the sculptural sense with obvious light and shadow effects. The basic form of a square or rectangle brings unity and a sense of order to the overall composition of the frame, but the variation in box size and skewness add arbitrariness and randomness to this composition. Unlike the exclusion of user participation in constructivist and epidermal theories, according to the architect's expectations, the exterior walls of the Da Fen Art Museum will be a field of government permission, public participation, and interaction and communication between architects and artists, thus reflecting a tolerant and open attitude. Da Fen Art Museum consciously regards itself as a public medium/carrier, actively allowing users and the public to participate and express themselves while expressing themselves.



The Large Relief in the Square of Dafen Art Museum (Photo by Zhang Yun)

Borrowing the concept of art critic Clement Greenberg, the architectural design of the Da Fen Art Museum can be seen as a rather elite form of 'avant-garde art', while oil painting replicas filled by local artists are known as 'vulgar art'. Here, two different forms of art with different tastes will coexist. This relationship is not exclusive or competitive, but consciously regards public expression as an organic part of realizing one's own value. This kind of inclusiveness embodies a Chinese style aesthetic approach, which provides viewers with the possibility of multi-level reception and appreciation. Like the paintings of Zhao Zhiqian and Wu Changshuo from the modern Shanghai School of Painting in China, as well as Qi Baishi from Beijing, their floral feathers and auspicious themes can satisfy the aesthetic taste of the general public. Their pursuit of taste and reference to ancient and vigorous calligraphy are also the goals of elite literati painting. Their paintings do not reject symbolism for the sake of abstraction, nor do they reject abstraction for the sake of symbolism, resulting in a shared appreciation between the refined and the popular. It can be imagined that the evaluation of the appearance of the Dafen Art Museum will also have the same possibility.

The Dafen Art Museum was built in 2007, but on this wall that has become a public medium, the architect's desire for artists to showcase their own works was not realized until August 2010. As part of the official event of the Shenzhen Case Pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo (China Shenzhen Dafen International Mural Invitation Exhibition), 50 domestic and foreign mural artists were invited to create 25. Their works are quite contemporary in style, with content and color tones intentionally highlighting the vibrancy and humor of the common people. However, the overall effect emphasizes a relaxed and lively atmosphere that everyone enjoys. The initial implementation was a relief sculpture on a huge red sandstone retaining wall with an area of 810 square meters, invested nearly 5 million yuan by the local government and located on the south side of the art museum. The title of the relief is 'A History of Western Art', which is based on the carving and painting of ancient Rome until the early 20th century, specifically the Cubism and Fauvism 26. This is an art history narrative that has been recognized by the Chinese education authorities. Its permanent material, commemorative scale, symbolic color, and even the formal display of the reproduced artworks are in stark contrast to the painting displays on the walls of the adjacent Da Fen Art Museum. It is not difficult to see that the Dafen Art Museum has become a touchstone, as it has witnessed and will continue to verify the degree of openness of a civil society. It will also prompt people to think about who will use the wall as a medium and spatial resource, and even the larger social public sphere, and how it will be used?

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Art as Resistance and Reconciliation: Muslim Women's Contemporary Art in Thailand's Deep South

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Abstract: This paper examines the role of contemporary art as a medium for resistance, reconciliation, and cultural representation among Muslim women artists in Thailand's conflict-affected Deep South. Focusing on the works of the Muslimah collective -- Arichama Pakapet, Heedayah Mahavi, Kufosiyah Nibuesa, Nuriya Waji, and their mentor Keeta Isran -- the study explores how these artists navigate identity, gender, and socio-political tensions through creative expression. Drawing from two journalistic sources documenting their exhibitions in Bangkok (2017, 2018-2019), the paper analyzes how their art challenges stereotypes, fosters interfaith understanding, and constructs alternative narratives of peace in a region marred by insurgency.

Key words: Muslim women artists; Peacebuilding through art; Feminist geopolitics; Thailand's Deep South conflict; Decolonial aesthetics; Interfaith dialogue.

1. Introduction

Thailand's Deep South -- comprising the provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat -- has, since 2004, been defined in national discourse primarily through the lens of separatist violence and insurgency. Mainstream representations, particularly in Thai-language media, often obscure the rich cultural and religious diversity of the region, portraying it instead as a peripheral zone of unrest. In response, a group of Muslim women artists from the area have come together to form the Muslimah collective. Led by artist and professor Keeta Isran, this collective uses contemporary art to subvert stereotypes, narrate untold stories, and create spaces of peace and beauty amid chaos. Through exhibitions such as Muslimah (2017) and Hope And Courage Human Compassion Love And Values Of Beauty In The Way Of Life (2018 - 2019), the group challenges hegemonic depictions of Muslim women as passive victims and the Deep South as irredeemably violent. This paper explores the artistic practices of the Muslimah collective as forms of soft resistance, cultural diplomacy, and feminist narrative-building.

2. Theoretical Framework: Situating the Muslimah Collective's Practice

This study engages multiple intersecting theoretical frameworks to analyze the Muslimah collective's artistic practice as a form of cultural resistance, feminist intervention, and peacebuilding in Thailand's Deep South. The analysis builds upon four primary theoretical foundations:

2.1 Decolonial Aesthetics and Epistemology

Drawing on Walter Mignolo (2011) and the modernity/coloniality school, we examine how the collective's use of indigenous materials and techniques constitutes a decolonial praxis that challenges Western art historical paradigms. Their work exemplifies what Mignolo terms "border thinking" - operating from the margins to decenter dominant narratives. [1] (Mignolo, 2011) The material choices (fishing nets, water hyacinth, batik) perform what Arturo Escobar (2018) calls "ontological politics" [2], asserting alternative ways of being and knowing against the Thai state's homogenizing national imaginary.

2.2 Feminist Geopolitics of Art

Building on Cynthia Enloe's (2013) feminist international relations theory [3] and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (2003)

transnational feminism [4], we analyze how these artists reconfigure the gendered geopolitics of Thailand's southern conflict. Their work embodies what W.J.T. Mitchell (2011) terms "image warfare" [5], contesting the masculinized visual regimes of both state counterinsurgency propaganda and militant Islamist iconography through what the artists call "feminine aesthetics".

2.3 Affective Economies and Cultural Memory

Employing Sara Ahmed's (2004) theory of affective economies [6] and Marianne Hirsch's (2012) concept of post-memory [7], we examine how the collective's artworks circulate emotional capital and construct intergenerational memory. The smoke imagery in Keeta Isran's photographs and the fragile materials in Heedayah Mahavi's installations materialize what Ann Cvetkovich (2003) calls an "archive of feelings" -- preserving traumatic histories through aesthetic forms that resist institutionalized narratives. [8]

2.4 Relational Aesthetics and Peacebuilding

Through Nicolas Bourriaud's (2002) relational aesthetics [9] and John Paul Lederach's (2005) conflict transformation theory [10], we analyze how De' Lapae Art Space functions as what Michel de Certeau (1984) would call a "space of tactics" [11] - creating micro-utopias of interfaith dialogue. The collective's exhibitions perform what Jacques Rancière (2010) terms the "redistribution of the sensible" [12], creating new perceptual frameworks for understanding the Deep South beyond security discourses.

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3. Materiality and Symbolism: Reclaiming Local Identity

A defining feature of the Muslimah collective's work is the deliberate use of indigenous and recycled materials to root their art in the physical and cultural terrain of the Deep South.

Arichama Pakapet, a contemporary artist hailing from Pattani province, represents a significant case study in the intersection of material culture and feminist praxis within Thailand's southern conflict zone. Her artistic trajectory exemplifies what Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) might characterize as the decolonial potential of situated knowledge production [13] -- transitioning from local joint exhibitions in her native region to seeking broader recognition in Bangkok's art world.

The artist's seminal work, Truth of Life (2017), merits particular theoretical attention for its sophisticated material semiotics. Constructed from repurposed fishing nets and water hyacinth -- materials deeply embedded in her familial and community context as the daughter of fishing industry workers -- the installation operates on multiple discursive levels. Following Tim Ingold's (2007) framework of "material entanglement" [14], the work's physical composition embodies the complex socio-economic realities of coastal Muslim women in Southern Thailand.

The grid-like structure of the woven fibers functions as what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would term a "rhizomatic" representation [15] of feminine subjectivity -- simultaneously constrained by patriarchal structures yet demonstrating agentive resistance through its intricate craftsmanship. This aligns with Judith Butler's (1990) conception of gender performativity [16], where the very act of weaving becomes a subversive repetition of traditionally feminine labor.

The work's thematic focus on "mixed emotions" and "facing one's demons" engages with Sara Ahmed's (2014) affective economies [17], illustrating how emotions circulate and accumulate value within specific cultural contexts. The use of natural dyes and locally-sourced materials further exemplifies Mignolo and Vázquez's (2013) decolonial aesthetic [18], rejecting Western art historical privileging of permanent media in favor of organic, ephemeral materials that reflect the precarity of life in conflict zones.

Through this material-semiotic analysis, Truth of Life (2017) emerges not merely as an artwork but as what Ariella Azoulay (2008) would call a "civil contract" -- a visual renegotiation [19] of Muslim women's place in Thailand's national imagi-



Figure 1. Truth of Life by Arichama Pakapet, Bangkok Art Biennale (October, 2018 - February, 2019)

Website Source: https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/1568302/peace-of-art

nary. The work's physical labor (the hand-sewn construction) mirrors the emotional labor required to navigate intersecting identities [20] as described by Hochschild (1983), making visible the often-invisible work of cultural negotiation performed by minority women in contested regions.

Heedayah Mahavi's artistic practice constitutes a sophisticated engagement with material epistemology and intergenerational memory that warrants careful theoretical examination. The work's deliberate incorporation of organic, ephemeral materials -- straw, tree bark, sandstone and glass -- operates on multiple discursive levels, articulating what might be termed a material poetics of feminine resilience in Thailand's contested southern borderlands. Drawing from indigenous knowledge systems while engaging contemporary art practices, Mahavi's choice of unstable, biodegradable media performs a complex mediation between permanence and transience that mirrors the precarious existence of cultural memory in conflict zones.

The artist's meticulous process of balancing color and texture through these fragile materials enacts a form of embodied knowledge production that recalls Tim Ingold's (2007) conceptualization of "making as a process of growth" [21]. Each



Figure 2. The Feeling Of A Loved One by Heedayah Mahavi, Bangkok Art Biennale (October, 2018 - February, 2019)

Website Link: https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/1568302/peace-of-art

labor-intensive stroke becomes an act of cultural preservation, where the very instability of the materials serves as a metaphor for the fragility of intergenerational transmission in contexts of political violence. This material practice gains deeper significance when read alongside the artist's own testimony (Bangkok Post, 2019) regarding her mother's central role as both muse and moral compass -- "My mother has been my biggest inspiration...this exhibit is dedicated to her." [22] Such statements reveal how the work functions as what Marianne Hirsch has theorized as an archive of "post-memory" [23], where second-generation artists inherit and rework traumatic histories through aesthetic practice rather than direct experience.

Mahavi's portraits of elderly women, particularly the recurring representation of her mother, construct what might be understood as a counter-narrative to dominant representations of Muslim women in southern Thailand. The works refuse both the orientalist trope of the passive victim and the state-sponsored image of the threatening insurgent, instead also presenting what Sara Ahmed (2004) would call an "affective economy" [24] of feminine strength and endurance just as stated previously. The material choices here are profoundly significant -- the incorporation of glass fragments amidst organic matter suggests what Diana Taylor (2003) has described as the "repertoire" of embodied cultural knowledge [25] that exists alongside, and often in tension with, official historical archives.

The technical challenges Mahavi describes in preserving these organic materials - their tendency to decay, the difficulty of achieving color balance -- become allegorical of the broader struggle to maintain cultural continuity in the face of political erasure. This resonates with Homi K. Bhabha's conceptualization of cultural translation, where the very process of material transformation in the artwork mirrors the necessary but fraught negotiations between tradition and modernity, between local identity and national belonging. [26] (Bhabha, 2011) The work's material instability thus performs a kind of resistance to what Ariella Azoulay (2008) has critiqued as the "imperial shutter" of dominant historiography [27], insisting instead on the right to ephemerality and processual becoming.

What emerges from this analysis is an artistic practice that refuses easy categorization. Mahavi's work exists at the intersection of material ethnography and contemporary art, of personal memoir and collective history, of traditional craft and avant-garde experimentation. The fragile equilibrium she achieves between these competing demands -- both materially and conceptually -- offers a powerful model for how art might articulate complex identities in contexts of political conflict, not through didactic statements but through the very texture and substance of its making. In this sense, Mahavi's work constitutes what might be termed a "material testimony" -- one that speaks through its fibers and pigments as much as through its representational content, and in doing so, recon-

figures our understanding of both artistic practice and cultural memory in Thailand's Deep South.

Keeta Isran's artistic practice and curatorial work articulate a sophisticated framework of aesthetic resistance and communal healing that demands critical examination through multiple theoretical lenses. Her conceptualization of art as "part of the healing process" resonates profoundly with trauma theory, particularly Dori Laub's assertion that artistic creation can serve as a "testimonial process" (Laub & Felman, 1992) for communities experiencing chronic violence. [28] The monochromatic photographic series featuring veiled women enveloped in atmospheric haze operates as what Michel Foucault might term a "counter-memory" - challenging the dominant



Figure 3. A Muslimah by Keeta Isran, Bangkok Art Biennale (October, 2018 - February, 2019)

Website Link: https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/1568302/peace-of-art

mediascape's representation of Southern Thailand's Muslim communities through what Keeta describes as a visual "journal" of everyday existence.

The symbolic deployment of smoke in her work performs complex semiotic labor, simultaneously evoking and subverting the region's association with violence. This artistic strategy aligns with Jacques Rancière's (2010) concept of the "redistribution of the sensible", where aesthetic choices reconfigure what can be perceived and understood about a community. [29] Keeta's insistence that the smoke represents "memories and hope" rather than destruction constitutes a deliberate act of what W.J.T. Mitchell (2011) calls "image warfare" -- contesting hegemonic visual regimes through subtle re-signification. [30] Her metaphor of "planting flowers in a war zone" powerfully encapsulates this approach, recalling Gilles Deleuze's notion of art as resistance through the creation of "minoritarian" spaces of becoming. [31] (Yu, 2015)

The establishment of De' Lapae Art Space in 2015 represents a significant intervention in what Pierre Bourdieu (2002) would term the "field of cultural production" [32] in Southern Thailand. Operating without institutional support, this initiative embodies Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "third space" -- an interstitial site where new cultural meanings and social relations can be negotiated. [33] Keeta's observation about shifting attitudes toward art in the region reflects a gradual transformation in what Raymond Williams (2006) might call the "structure of feeling" [34] among local communities, suggesting the emergence of alternative cultural imaginaries that transcend rigid religious interpretations.

The pedagogical dimension of Keeta's practice -- her emphasis on using art to "educate society about the similarities between differing cultures" -- demonstrates what Paulo Freire (1970) would recognize as a practice of "cultural action for freedom". [35] This is particularly significant given the geopolitical context, where art becomes what Nato Thompson (2018) terms "seeing power" - a means of making visible alternative narratives that challenge both state and insurgent discourses. [36] The intergenerational impact Keeta notes, with younger artists gaining recognition beyond the region, suggests what Arjun Appadurai (2013) might characterize as the development of new "cultural flows" that bypass traditional centers of artistic legitimacy. [37]

Through this multilayered practice encompassing creation, curation, and community-building, Keeta articulates what might be termed a "poetics of everyday resilience" -- one that transforms aesthetic production into what James C. Scott (2012) would call an "infra-political" tool of subtle resistance. [38] Her work ultimately constructs what Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) might describe as a "relational aesthetics" of coexistence [39], where artistic practice becomes both testimony to present struggles and speculative blueprint for alternative futures in Thailand's contested southern borderlands.

4. Subverting Stereotypes: Muslim Women as Agents, Not Victims

Through their art, the Muslimah collective confronts and subverts dominant representations of Muslim women in Thai society. Their works directly engage with the prejudice they face, especially when traveling outside their home provinces.

Kufosiyah Nibuesa's artistic practice emerges as a compelling case study in the intersection of aesthetic production, identity politics, and postcolonial representation in Thailand's contested southern borderlands. Her works Border Peace and Life-

style in Transition articulate what Homi K. Bhabha (2011) might term a "narrative of counter-globalization" [40] -- one that simultaneously engages with Western artistic traditions while remaining firmly rooted in local epistemologies. The artist's bas-relief technique, employing locally-sourced recycled papers folded into intricate three-dimensional forms, enacts what Tim Ingold (2007) describes as a "textility of making" [41], where the very materiality of the work embodies the social fabric of Pattani's communities.

Kufosiyah's meticulous documentation of quotidian scenes -- the vegetable vendor, the elderly woman in a rickshaw -- constitutes what Michel de Certeau (1984) would recognize as a "practice of everyday life" [42], challenging the spectacularized violence that dominates media representations of the Deep South. Her artistic methodology recalls Arjun Appadurai's (2013) concept of "grassroots globalization" [43], where the painstaking accumulation of material details serves to reconstruct what Edward W. Said (2009) might call an "imaginative geography" [44] of Pattani that resists both orientalist and nationalist narratives. The artist's personal encounters with prejudice in Bangkok - being treated as a potential terrorist -- reveal what Sara Ahmed (2004) terms the "stickiness" of racialized affect [45], where bodies become inscribed with pre-existing narratives of threat and suspicion.

The structural complexity of Kufosiyah's bas-relief technique merits particular attention. By literally folding two-dimensional surfaces into three-dimensional forms, the artist performs what Gilles Deleuze (1995) might describe as a "deterritorialization" of conventional artistic media. [46] This formal innovation mirrors the conceptual work of her practice - transforming flat stereotypes into nuanced, embodied representations. Kufosiyah's observational acuity enables what Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011) would call a "right to look" -- the power to determine how her community is represented visually. [47]

Kufosiyah's transnational aspirations - her desire to exhibit abroad while pursuing graduate studies -- suggest an awareness of what Nestor García Canclini (2006) terms "hybrid cultures", where local traditions engage in dialogic exchange with global artistic discourses. [48] This positioning resists both parochial isolation and uncritical assimilation, instead articulating what might be called a "critical regionalism" in contemporary Southeast Asian art. The recycled materials in her work perform double duty: materially, they reference environmental sustainability; symbolically, they represent what Ann Laura Stoler (2016) calls "imperial debris" - the remains of colonial and postcolonial histories that artists must work through and reconfigure. [49]

Ultimately, Kufosiyah's practice constitutes what Ariella Azoulay (2008) terms a "civil imagination" - using aesthetic means to renegotiate the terms of citizenship and belonging [50], just like what Arichama Pakapet did in her Truth of Life (2017).

Her works also create what Rancière (2010) would call a "redistribution of the sensible" [51], making visible the ordinary lives that official narratives of conflict render invisible, just as Keeta Isran's works.

In this sense, her artistic journey - from Pattani to Bangkok and potentially beyond -- mirrors the conceptual trajectory of her work: folding local particularities into global conversations, while maintaining what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak



Figure 4. A Conversation in Pattani by Kufosiyah Nibuesa, Bangkok Art Biennale (October, 2018 - February, 2019)

Website Link: https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/1568302/peace-of-art



Figure 5. The Life of Daeya Doloh by Nuriya Waji, Bangkok Art Biennale (October, 2018 - February, 2019)

Website Link: https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/1568302/peace-of-art

(2010) might term the "texture" of situated knowledge. [52] The "long road ahead" that Kufosiyah references becomes not just a personal artistic journey, but a metaphor for the difficult work of cultural translation in postcolonial contexts.

Nuriya Waji's artistic practice constitutes a profound engagement with the phenomenology of emotional experience and the politics of representation in Thailand's contested southern borderlands. Her batik works, which document fluctuating affective states through diurnal variations in technique and palette, exemplify again what Sara Ahmed (2004) terms "affective economies" [53], share the "common function" with the artworks of Arichama Pakapet and Heedayah Mahavi.

The artist's methodological approach of using her own body as primary subject, recalls Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity [54] too, wherein the repeated artistic inscription of self becomes an act of both personal expression and political signification.

The technical challenges Waji describes in controlling watercolor flow and brushstroke intensity reveal what Tim Ingold would characterize as a "dwelling perspective" on artistic practice - where mastery emerges through sustained, embodied engagement with materials rather than abstract technical knowledge. This material praxis takes on added significance when considered alongside her cross-cultural upbringing in Pattani, where daily interactions with Buddhist neighbors created what Homi K. Bhabha might term a "third space" of intercultural negotiation. [55] Waji's observation about asymmetrical cultural knowledge -- that Muslim residents understood Buddhist traditions more thoroughly than vice versa -- illustrates what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010) identifies as the epistemic violence inherent in colonial and postcolonial power structures. [56]

Waji's transnational educational trajectory, from Pattani to Bangkok with aspirations toward Japanese and European galleries, also enacts what Arjun Appadurai (2013) describes as the "global cultural flows" [57] that characterize contemporary artistic production, which echoes Keeta Isran's artistic experiment.

However, her work resists homogenizing globalization through its steadfast engagement with traditional batik techniques - a strategic essentialism that recalls Stuart Hall's (2017) conceptualization of cultural identity as both "being" and "becoming". [58] The artist's rhetorical question - "Just how much does our society understand the Thai Muslim woman?" - exposes what Michel Foucault would identify as the regimes of knowledge/power that construct minority subjectivities within nationalist discourses.

Her vision of interfaith friendship as cultural pedagogy aligns with Paulo Freire's (2005) model of dialogic education [59], where reciprocal learning becomes an antidote to what Edward Said analyzed as orientalist constructions of Islamic cultures. The batik medium itself, with its wax-resist process of layered coloration, serves as an apt metaphor for Waji's conceptual framework - where cultural preservation and transformation occur simultaneously through a process of selective permeability. In this sense, her artistic practice performs what Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) terms "relational aesthetics" [60] creating spaces for intercultural encounter that challenge the sectarian divisions plaguing Thailand's Deep South, similar with Keeta Isran's artistic practice.

5. Conclusion: Art as Peacebuilding - Healing through Creativity

More than resistance, the Muslimah collective views their work as a form of healing. Keeta Isran likens it to "planting flowers in a war zone" -- a poignant metaphor for creating beauty and hope amid uncertainty. As part of the 2018 - 2019 Bangkok Art Biennale, their exhibition titled Hope And Courage Human Compassion Love And Values Of Beauty In The Way Of Life embodied this ethos [61] (Bangkok Post, 2019). The collective's message was deliberately universal, appealing to shared values and emotions.

Their focus on feminine aesthetics -- stitched cloth, woven nets, delicate etchings -- offers a quiet but powerful counter-narrative to the masculine-coded violence that dominates news about the Deep South. By centering women's experiences and creating artworks that resonate emotionally and culturally, the collective contributes to a grassroots form of peacebuilding.

Their community initiatives, particularly the De' Lapae Contemporary Art Space in Narathiwat, co-founded by Keeta and fellow artist Prach Pimarnman, function as incubators for young talent and intercommunal dialogue. By offering workshops, exhibitions, and open studios, De' Lapae becomes a sanctuary of creativity that resists the fear and fragmentation bred by conflict [62] (Bangkok Post, 2019).

The Muslimah collective exemplifies how contemporary art can serve as a transformative medium in contexts of conflict and marginalization. By grounding their work in local materials, articulating complex emotional and cultural experiences, and reclaiming visual narratives, these Muslim women artists resist both the violence of insurgency and the violence of misrepresentation. Their art bridges personal pain and collective memory, offering viewers not only a glimpse into life in the Deep South, but also a hopeful vision for the future.

Through their exhibitions in Bangkok and beyond, the Muslimah artists challenge audiences to move beyond simplistic binaries of victim/terrorist, peaceful/violent, Muslim/Buddhist. They instead offer textured portrayals of humanity,

creativity, and coexistence. Future studies might expand on the role of such grassroots art movements in shaping national reconciliation and interfaith understanding. What is clear, however, is that these women have already succeeded in planting seeds -- of beauty, resistance, and hope -- where few had thought to look.

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From Trash to Fashion: Understanding Wearable Art as Environmental Activism

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Abstract: This paper employs critical discourse analysis and environmental communication theories to examine how wearable art projects like Trashion Fashion and Wan Yunfeng's plastic couture function as forms of material rhetoric and ecological activism. Drawing on theories of object-oriented ontology (Harman, 2018), waste studies (Hawkins, 2006), and visual rhetoric (Finnegan, 2001), we argue that these interventions perform three crucial functions: They materialize the abstract concept of waste pollution; Creating affective encounters that disrupt consumption habits; Reconfiguring human-waste relationships through aesthetic transformation. Our analysis reveals how these projects operate within what Bennett (2010) calls "vibrant matter" to challenge neoliberal waste regimes while offering new paradigms for sustainable engagement.

Key words: Waste Aesthetics; Material Rhetoric; Eco-Fashion Activism; Object-Oriented Ontology; Affective Ecology; Upcycling Art.

1. Introduction: Theorizing Waste Aesthetics

The contemporary waste crisis demands approaches that transcend traditional environmental communication models. While statistical reports and policy documents dominate institutional discourse (Cox, 2013), their efficacy remains limited by what Nisbet (2009) terms the "knowledge deficit model". In contrast, material-aesthetic interventions like wearable art employ what Gabrys (2013) calls "tactical media" - creative practices that reconfigure environmental messaging through embodied, visual, and affective means.

This paper builds on three theoretical frameworks:

New Materialist Perspectives (Bennett, 2010; Barad, 2007): Examining how waste materials gain agency through artistic transformation

Environmental Communication (Cox & Pezzullo, 2021): Analyzing how fashion performs rhetorical work beyond verbal discourse

Waste Studies (Lepawsky & Mather, 2011): Contextualizing upcycling within global waste regimes

2. Theoretical Framework: Material Rhetoric and Waste Agency

2.1 Object-Oriented Ontology and Waste Matter

Building on Harman's (2018) object-oriented philosophy, we argue that Trashion Fashion reveals the withdrawn potentialities of waste objects. When a K-cup becomes couture, it undergoes what Bryant (2011) terms a "translational event" - revealing latent capacities obscured by its designation as trash. This aligns with Bennett's (2010) concept of "thing-power", where materials assert their vibrancy against human categorization systems.

2.2 Visual Rhetoric and Ecological Persuasion

Finnegan's (2001) framework of visual rhetoric helps unpack how these projects persuade differently than statistical environmental reports. The grotesque beauty of Wan's plastic gowns creates what DeLuca (1999) calls "image events" - disruptive visual spectacles that reframe public discourse. Their aesthetic duality (attractive yet repulsive) generates the cognitive dissonance required for attitudinal change (Festinger, 1957).

2.3 Affect Theory and Waste Encounters

Ahmed's (2004) work on affective economies explains how Merli's "trash OCD" operates. The tactile process of handling waste materials produces what Stewart (2007) terms "ordinary affects" - visceral, pre-cognitive responses that bypass rational resistance to environmental messaging.

3. Trashion Fashion: Pedagogical Materialism and the Re-ontologization of Waste

Merli's Trashion Fashion initiative operates as a form of what



Figure 1. Trashion Fashion (2013), T-stage show

Website Source: https://thetakemagazine.com/trashion-fashion-hartford/

Bennett (2010) would call "enchanted materialism", where discarded objects are reanimated through aesthetic intervention.

This project exemplifies three key theoretical interventions:

3.1 Subversive Recategorization Through Tactile Praxis

The mandatory use of strictly non-recyclable materials performs what De Certeau (1984) terms a "tactical" subversion of institutional waste categorization systems. By requiring participants to handle materials like used gum wrappers and K-cups - items that exist in what Hawkins (2006) calls "waste's liminal zone" (too contaminated for recycling yet too persistent for disappearance) - the project forces a material confrontation with what society has deemed "beyond salvage". This tactile engagement produces what Paterson (2007) describes as "haptic knowledge" a corporeal understanding that disrupts the cognitive distancing inherent in contemporary waste disposal systems (Gille, 2010).

3.2 Temporal Reconfiguration of Waste Streams

The transformation of ephemeral disposables (like single-use plastics with functional lifespans measured in minutes) into durable couture pieces queers the temporality of waste (Freeman, 2010). This aligns with Grosz's (2004) concept of "time outside time", where artistic intervention creates what waste scholars call "reverse archaeology" (Reno, 2015) - instead of excavating past material cultures, we project contemporary



Figure 2. Trashion Fashion (2013), Balcony dancing

Website Source: https://thetakemagazine.com/trashion-fashion-hartford/

waste into imagined future aesthetic regimes. The runway show format further temporalizes this through what Crang (2001) terms "waste performativity", staging cyclical time (seasonal fashion) against linear disposal narratives.

3.3 Pedagogical Dimensions of Material Engagement

The school-based workshops enact what Ellsworth (2005) calls "material pedagogy", where learning occurs through disruptive encounters with reconfigured objects rather than didactic instruction. This aligns with recent developments in environmental education that emphasize "post-sustainability" approaches (Jickling & Sterling, 2017), focusing not on solutions but on complicating student relationships with material flows. The reported "trash OCD" phenomenon mirrors what Alaimo (2016) observes in toxic body awareness - a hyperconsciousness of previously invisible material permeations.

4. Wan Yunfeng: Dystopian Couture as Transnational Material Critique

Wan Yunfeng's wearable art transcends mere upcycling, operating instead as a form of material-semiotic activism that interrogates global waste regimes through fashion. His work engages in what Nicholas Mirzoeff (2014) terms "visual capitalism critique"—a mode of resistance that exposes the contradictions of late capitalism by rendering its material consequences visible, tactile, and affectively charged. Through three key theoretical maneuvers—plastic cosmopolitics, counter-visuality, and hyper-object couture—Wan's practice forces a reckoning with the ecological and geopolitical violence embedded in everyday consumption.

4.1 Plastic Cosmopolitics: Waste Colonialism and Charismatic Matter

Wan transformed IKEA's signature blue shopping bags—emblems of Scandinavian sustainability branding—into haute couture gowns that unravel the myth of ethical consumption.



Figure 3. An image taken in New York's Times Square shows Wan Yunfeng dressed in a bright blue gown made of IKEA shopping bags.

Website Source: https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/wan-yunfeng-environment-artist-intl-hnk/index.html

This intervention materializes Isabelle Stengers' (2005) concept of "cosmopolitical proposals"—artistic acts that compel disparate actors (consumers, corporations, policymakers) to confront their complicity in waste economies.

Waste Colonialism (Liboiron, 2021):

The repurposed IKEA bags visualize how Global North sustainability rhetoric often obscures ongoing material displacement. While European consumers are encouraged to "recycle responsibly," much of their plastic waste is shipped to the Global South under exploitative conditions. Wan's gowns, shimmering with the familiar blue plastic, become wearable maps of this transnational waste trade.

Charismatic Material (Tsing, 2015):

The IKEA bag's vivid hue and corporate branding make it an ideal "charismatic material"—an ordinary object that, when aesthetically reconfigured, magnetizes public attention. By elevating this banal commodity to couture, Wan exposes the "slow violence" (Nixon, 2011) of plastic's afterlife: a single bag might circulate for centuries, outlasting its human users.

It could be said that Wan's blue paradox gown, crafted entirely from heat-fused IKEA bags, mimics the silhouette of a 19th-century crinoline—a nod to both consumerism's excess and the gendered labor of waste management. The piece's unsettling beauty (the plastic appears ethereal under runway lights) creates cognitive dissonance, forcing viewers to reconcile attraction with ecological guilt.

4.2 Counter-visuality and Waste Aesthetics

Wan's hybrid designs (merging qipao silhouettes with European Victorian structures) create what Bhabha (1994) calls "third space aesthetics" - visual embodiments of globalization's material contradictions. The Parisian quilt gown particularly exemplifies what Nixon (2011) describes as rendering "slow violence" visible - the faded fabric whispering histories of domestic labor and textile waste streams. This operates as what Demos (2016) terms "forensic aesthetics", where fashion becomes evidentiary of systemic harm.

Forensic Aesthetics (Demos, 2016):

The Parisian Quilt Gown, assembled from discarded fast-fashion textiles, operates as evidence of fast fashion's hidden costs. Each stained and frayed patch narrates a history of exploited garment workers (often women of color in Global South sweatshops) and the racialized geopolitics of textile waste.

Slow Violence Made Visible (Nixon, 2011):

Unlike dramatic images of oil spills, Wan's work reveals pollution's banal accumulation. A gown's gradual disintegration during a performance (e.g., plastic seams cracking under movement) stages Nixon's "slow violence"—the incremental, often invisible destruction wrought by consumerism.

4.3 Hyper-object Couture

The works materially manifest Morton's (2013) concept of hyper-objects - making tangible the vast spatiotemporal scales of plastic pollution. A dress woven from fishing nets doesn't just represent ocean waste; it becomes a localized encounter with what DeLoughrey (2019) calls the "oceanic Anthropocene". The wearable format ensures this encounter is literally

embodied, fulfilling Alaimo's (2010) call for "trans-corporeal" environmental art.

Trans-Corporeality (Alaimo, 2010):

When models don Wan's plastic garments, they enact Stacy Alaimo's "trans-corporeality"—the porous interchange between human bodies and toxic environments. Microplastics, once distant pollutants, now cling to the skin as "fashion," collapsing the illusion of bodily separation from waste streams.

Reverse Archaeology (Reno, 2015):



igure 4. Protection of the ocean Series 1 - Struggle by Wan Yunfeng

Website Source: https://collectiftextile.com/wan-yun-feng/

Wan's designs function as future fossils. A corset made from silicone food molds (items designed for single-use) becomes a relic of 21st-century disposability, queering linear time by framing waste as both contemporary debris and future cultural artifact.

5. Discussion: Toward a Theory of Waste Aesthetics

5.1 The Parallax of Waste: Dialectical Materialism in Aesthetic Form

Building on Žižek's (2006) concept of the parallax gap, wearable waste art creates a sustained visual and material dialectic that forces viewers to hold contradictory perceptions simultaneously:

Ontological Duality: Each piece exists as both trash and treasure, materializing what Derrida (1994) called the "spectral" nature of discarded objects - their persistent haunting of consumer consciousness even after disposal. A plastic bottle gown simultaneously declares its former life as disposable packaging and its new existence as cultural artifact.

Temporal Paradox: The works embody what Elizabeth Grosz (2004) terms "untimely" objects, disrupting linear narratives of progress. They function as what Harootunian (2007) calls "archival objects of the future", where contemporary waste becomes future aesthetic relic, collapsing distinctions between past consumption and future cultural value.

Affective Contradiction: Ngai's (2012) concept of the "stuplime" (merging shock and boredom) manifests when viewers oscillate between admiration for craftsmanship and disgust at material origins. This creates what Massumi (2002) would identify as an "autonomous affect" - a visceral response that bypasses cognitive resistance to environmental messaging.

5.2 Haptic Visuality and the Politics of Touch

Expanding Laura Marks' (2000) theory beyond visual representation, we identify four dimensions of waste's tactile politics:

Contaminant Intimacy: The requirement to handle society's most reviled materials creates what Kristeva (1982) would recognize as abjection overcome through ritual - a secular purification through aesthetic transformation. Participants report what Povinelli (2016) terms "ge-ontological anxiety" (fear of non-life) when touching materials that exist in states between vital and inert.

Labor Materialization: Unlike sanitized recycling systems, these projects showcase the literal hands-on labor of material redemption. Following Federici's (2012) analysis of reproductive labor, we see the stitching and assembly as revealing capitalism's hidden "waste work" - the gendered, racialized labor of material management obscured by disposal infrastructures.

Cross-Class Material Encounters: The democratization of materials (from gum wrappers to IKEA bags) creates what Bennett (2018) calls "cross-class material confederations". However, following Bourdieu (1984), we must question whether transforming trash into high fashion inadvertently reinforces cultural capital hierarchies in environmentalism.

Tactile Temporality: The wear and decay of these garments over time materializes what Yusoff (2018) calls "deep time" of waste. Unlike conventional fashion's seasonal obsolescence, plastic couture's gradual degradation performs Nixon's (2011) "slow violence" in microcosm.

5.3 Toward a Queer Ecology of Waste

Building on Mortimer-Sandilands' (2010) framework, three

radical interventions have been proposed:

Non-Reproductive Materiality: The works embody what Edelman (2004) terms "reproductive futurism" refused. Instead of children as ecological hope, we have K-cup ballgowns as monuments to present consumption - what Muñoz (2009) might call "queer waste temporalities" that reject capitalist tele-ologies of progress.

Vibrant Performativity: The runway context allows waste materials to "come out", performing what Barad (2012) calls "posthuman performativity". A plastic bag's agency shifts dramatically when walking a catwalk versus choking marine life, revealing what Chen (2012) identifies as "animacy hierarchies" in environmental politics.

Toxic Intimacies: Following Alaimo's (2016) "trans-corporeality", models literally embody society's waste streams. This creates what Neimanis (2017) terms "hydro-feminist" connections - recognizing our bodies as always already containing the microplastics we wear as fashion.

5.4 The Limits of Aesthetic Activism

While theoretically potent, we must critically examine:

The Spectacle Paradox: Does transforming waste into glamorous couture risk what Debord (1967) warned of - the subsumption of critique into spectacle? Can shock aesthetics lead to what Žižek (2008) calls "cultural capitalism", where transgression becomes commodified?

Material Constraints: Following Gabrys' (2013) analysis of "digital rubbish", we must ask whether focusing on physical waste materials obscures more insidious forms of pollution (data waste, chemical toxins) that resist aestheticization.

Labor Inequities: The projects risk what Nixon (2011) calls "slow violence invisibility" - while highlighting material waste, they may obscure the human costs of waste management (waste picker labor, global South dumping grounds).

6. Conclusion: Waste Aesthetics and the Reenchantment of Material Ethics

The radical interventions of Trashion Fashion and Wan Yunfeng's plastic couture do far more than repurpose refuse—they stage a fundamental renegotiation of humanity's relationship with matter itself. These projects enact what Jane Bennett (2010) might call a "re-enchantment" of waste, revealing the latent vitality in what capitalist modernity has deemed inert and disposable. By forcing plastic bags, K-cups, and discarded wrappers into the rarefied space of high fashion, they perform a subversive alchemy: not merely upcycling, but re-ontologizing waste, challenging the very categories that relegate certain materials to oblivion.

At their core, these works operate as material parables for the Anthropocene. They make visible what Timothy Morton (2013) terms the "hyper-object" of plastic pollution—vast, intangible ecological crises made graspable through aesthetic encounter. A dress woven from fishing nets is no longer just a garment; it becomes a tactile archive of oceanic violence, a wearable map of humanity's toxic legacies. In this sense, wearable waste art transcends symbolic representation to become what Donna Haraway (2016) calls a "material-semiotic actor", actively reshaping our understanding of consumption, disposal, and responsibility.

Yet this movement's true power lies in its affective pedagogy. Unlike statistical environmental reports that speak to the cognitive, these projects target what Kathleen Stewart (2007) identifies as the "ordinary affects" of daily life—the visceral, pre-linguistic sensations that bypass ideological resistance. When an audience member recoils at recognizing their daily coffee pod refashioned as an elegant bodice, they experience what Bruno Latour (2004) describes as a "matter of concern" becoming palpable. This shock of recognition—this moment where waste ceases to be "away" and instead becomes a part of us—is where behavioral change germinates.

However, we must temper this optimism with critical reflection. As these works enter galleries and runways, they risk what Lauren Berlant (2011) calls "cruel optimism"—the paradoxical dynamic where critique becomes complicit in the systems it seeks to dismantle. Can plastic couture truly disrupt consumerism when it circulates within the same luxury economies that produce such waste? Does aestheticizing pollution inadvertently anesthetize its horrors? These questions demand that we follow the material trajectories beyond the runway—to examine how such projects intersect with labor justice, policy reform, and grassroots activism.

Ultimately, the theory of waste aesthetics developed here suggests that the most profound environmental interventions may not come from policy papers or apocalyptic warnings, but from relearning how to see—and touch, and wear—the materials we discard. In making waste beautiful, strange, and intimate, these artists perform nothing less than a phenomenological revolution: they dissolve the Cartesian divide between human and object, active consumer and passive trash. What emerges is something far more radical than recycling—a vision of material kinship where every plastic bottle, every scrap of foil, every discarded wrapper retains its narrative potential, its vibrancy, its demand that we reckon with its existence.

The future of environmentalism may well depend on our ability to sustain this paradoxical vision: to hold, as Žižek (2006) would insist, both the horror of our waste crisis and the trans-

formative potential within it. For in the end, the most subversive act may not be eliminating waste, but finally recognizing it—not as garbage, but as the unquiet ghost of our own consumption, returned to us in the form of art, demanding dialogue, accountability, and perhaps, redemption.

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Re - exploration of the Possible Original Appearance of the Yongning Temple Pagoda in Luoyang during the Northern Wei Dynasty

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Abstract: In the 1980s, the author paid close attention to the research on the Pagoda of Yongning Temple in Luoyang, Northen-Wei Dynasty(386-534) and tried to discuss the possibility of the original situation, but stopped because of lack of data. In the 1990s, two scholars of architectural history carried out original restoration research on the pagoda of Yongning Temple on the basis of archaeological materials. After that, the author participated in the restoration of Yongning Temple Pagoda again due to a special reason. Based on the historical records of Yongning Temple Pagoda and the characteristics of the number "seven" existing in archaeological excavations, combined with the proportion rules of Chinese and Japanese pagodas in the tower body in similar times, complete a discussion of possible restoration of the original state. However, there have always been some doubts about the proportions and figures in this study. In the following years, the author reconsidered and reanalyzed the number "nine" in the records of the plane and the height of the tower body at the archaeological site, and the possible data control effect of this number in the ratio of the plane and height of the tower body. At the same time, the adobe center column of the tower in the previous restoration was also analyzed and discussed. This paper is the new paper based on this thinking and research.

Key words: Pagoda in Yongning Temple, Restoration, Factors of Number Seven, Factors of Number Nine, Dimensions on Building Plane and Height

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Introduction

The Yongning Temple Pagoda in Luoyang during the Northern Wei Dynasty was the tallest wooden structure ever built in Chinese history and even in world history. The academic community has been paying attention to and researching this tall wooden pagoda for decades. The earlier research can be first seen in the book "History of Ancient Chinese Architectural Technology" (compiled by the Institute for the History of Natural Sciences, Chinese Academy of Sciences) published by Science Press in 1985. In this book, Mr. Chen Mingda（陈明达）expressed doubts about the height of the Yongning Temple Pagoda in the Northern Wei Dynasty as recorded in historical documents. Mr. Chen believed that according to the description in historical materials, the tower body might be more than one hundred meters high, which was almost impossible to achieve in ancient wooden structure practices. He believes that "the total height of the entire Yongning Temple Pagoda should not exceed twenty-seven zhang （丈） and one chi（尺） (the total height is 75.60 meters.)" [Edited by Zhang Yuhuan. History of Ancient Chinese Architectural Technology. Chapter 5. Wooden Structure Building Technology. Science Press. 1985]. This conclusion was the earliest research based on the academic judgment of the structural rationality of the Yongning Temple Pagoda.

In the early 1980s, Ye Dasong（叶大松）, a Taiwanese scholar, in order to prove the height of the Yongning Temple Pagoda, based on historical records that there was a golden treasure bottle at the top of the pagoda's spire that could hold twenty-five shi (石，shi is an ancient Chinese unit for calculating weight). "In the second year of Xiaochang (孝昌二年，526), a strong wind blew down houses and uprooted trees. The treasure bottle on the spire fell with the wind and sank more than one zhang（about 2.78 meters deep） into

the ground." [[Northern Wei Dynasty] Yang Xianzhi. Records of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang. Volume 1. Inside the City] Taking the possible weight of this metal ball, combined with the gravitational force of the earth and the impact force formed by the acceleration of high-altitude falling objects, and the depth of more than one zhang that it sank into the special collapsible loess in the Henan region, he calculated the possible height of the pagoda in reverse. He believed that what Yang Xuanzhi（杨衒之） of the Northern Wei Dynasty said: "There is a nine-story stupa (pagoda) in the middle, built with wood. The height of the pagoda body is ninety zhang. There is a spire (a component on the top of the pagoda) on it, which is another ten zhang high, equivalent to one thousand chi from the ground."[[Northern Wei Dynasty] Yang Xianzhi. Records of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang. Volume 1. Inside the City] should be true. Based on this, Ye Dasong believed that the incredible height of several hundred meters might be real.

Obviously, the two viewpoints push the judgment of the height of the Yongning Temple Pagoda to two extremes: First, considering the rationality of ancient wooden structures, it is unlikely that the height of the pagoda exceeded more than 70 meters. Second, by using modern physics thinking, it is proven that the descriptions in ancient texts are reasonable. However, the latter view only relies on the records in the book "Notes on the Monasteries of Luoyang（洛阳伽蓝记）", while ignoring another description by Li Daoyuan（郦道元）, who was also from the Northern Wei Dynasty.

Around the same time, the author also became interested in this issue. Around 1984, the author wrote an article titled "Research on the Credibility of the Height of the Yongning Temple Pagoda in Luoyang during the Northern Wei Dynasty". The materials on which this article is based mainly come from the records in "Commentary on the Waterways Classic（水经注）" by Li Daoyuan: "West of the water, there is the Yongning Temple, which was first built during the Xiping（熙平） period (516 - 518). A nine - storey pagoda was constructed. The base of the pagoda is square with each side being fourteen zhang long. From the golden dew plate to the ground, it is forty - nine zhang high. It drew on the style of the seven - storey pagoda in the capital of the Dai (Pingcheng, now Datong in Shanxi Province), but it is taller and broader. Even in the prosperous Eastern and Western Capitals (Luoyang and Chang'an), and the wealthy Five Capitals (in the Han Dynasty, Luoyang, Handan, Linzi, Wan, and Chengdu were regarded as the Five Capitals), among those famous temples and pagodas, there is no such building."[[Northern Wei Dynasty] Li Daoyuan. Water Classic Annotations. Volume 16. Valley Water]

Li Daoyuan provided a specific measurement of the tower's height that differed from Yang Xuanzhi's: from the base of the tower to the bottom of the finial, it was 49 zhang high, and the base of the tower was 14 zhang square. This height was only half of what Yang claimed. The official history "Book of Wei"（魏书） also corroborated this height: "During the Xiping（熙平） years of Emperor Suzong of the Northern Wei Dynasty, Yongning Temple was built to the west of the Taishe (a place where ancient emperors and feudal lords sacrificed to the gods of earth and grain) in the capital city. The Empress Dowager Ling personally led many court officials to determine the foundation of the temple and erect the finial post of the pagoda. The pagoda had nine stories and was over forty zhang high. The various expenses for building the temple were incalculable."[[Beiqi] Wei Shou. Book of Wei. Volume 114. Chapter 20. Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism 10] The author of "Book of Wei" was from the Northern Qi Dynasty (550 - 577), which was very close in time to the Northern Wei Dynasty. This record and Li Daoyuan's description can corroborate each other.

The "Book of Wei"（魏书）also mentions the designers and builders of this pagoda: "During the reigns of Emperor Shizong (500 - 515) and Emperor Suzong (515 - 528), Liu Jian（柳俭）from Yuzhou, Guan Wenbei（关文备）, a general in the palace, and Guo Anxing（郭安兴） were all ingenious. When building the nine - storey Buddha pagoda of Yongning Temple in Luoyang, Guo Anxing served as the chief craftsman."[[Beiqi] Wei Shou. Book of Wei. Volume 91. Biographies of Art and Skill, Part 79] It can be seen that this wooden pagoda, which was unparalleled in height in ancient and modern times, was designed and built by the craftsman Guo Anxing. Unfortunately, no further information about Guo Anxing can be found in historical records.

Out of curiosity, or due to the inner entanglement of being unable to agree with either of the two different viewpoints, based on the two basic data of the base being 14 zhang and the height below the pagoda finial being 49 zhang, the author made a speculation about the original appearance of the pagoda. From the possible construction relationship of the central column structure of this pagoda, as well as the possibilities of the longest timber used in logging, transportation, and construction, following the logic of ancient building structures, and repeatedly speculating on the drawing according to the length of the Northern Wei chi（尺）, the author roughly sketched the plan, elevation, section, and exterior views of this pagoda. The author believes that it was possible to build this wooden pagoda with a height of approximately 50 zhang. The purpose of this article is merely to verify whether this wooden pagoda recorded in ancient books is a historical truth or just the casual talk of the ancients. After the article was completed, it was not published. One of the reasons is that the author was looking forward to the publication of a detailed archaeological report to reduce blind misjudgment. Therefore, that manuscript and the analysis diagrams drawn on tracing paper were stuffed into a corner by the author.

In the 1990s, I noticed two published texts on the restoration of the Yongning Temple Pagoda, as well as a restoration

drawing of the Yongning Temple Pagoda based on archaeological data and combined with the height data of the pagoda recorded in "Commentary on the Water Classic"（水经注）. Since this is the case, the author's goal of demonstrating the credibility of the height of this pagoda has been proven, and the article written by the author previously to prove the credibility of the height of this pagoda is no longer meaningful.

After years of changes and relocations, the handwritten manuscript from the early 1980s, which was almost forgotten, and the imaginative perspective sketches painstakingly drawn on fragile tracing paper have disappeared. The only trace of this research can only be found in a drawing I made in the 1980s during my study of ancient high - rise wooden structures. In this comparison diagram, I presented the heights and volumes of the Wooden Pagoda of Yongning Temple in Luoyang during the Northern Wei Dynasty, the seven - story pagoda in Pingcheng（平城） of the Northern Wei Dynasty as recorded in history, the Chanding Temple（禅定寺） Pagoda in Chang'an of the Tang Dynasty, as well as high - rise wooden structures such as the Yingxian（应县） Wooden Pagoda, the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests in the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, and the Dacheng Pavilion （大乘阁）of Yongning Temple in Chengde（承德）. (Figure - 1)

1. Two important papers by peer scholars

In the 1970s of the last century, the archaeological community began to pay attention to the ruins of the Luoyang City of the Han and Wei dynasties, and also touched on some situations of the Yongning Temple Pagoda. In the 4th issue of the journal "Archaeology" in 1973, the article "Preliminary Exploration of the Luoyang City of the Han（From 202 BC to 220 AD） and Wei（386-534） Dynasties" was published. One of the subsections briefly described the temple walls, gate sites, and pagoda foundation of the Yongning Temple: "The plane of the pagoda foundation is square, rising in three layers. The top two layers can be seen standing on the current ground. The base of the bottom layer of rammed earth is nearly square, about 101 meters in the east-west direction, about 98 meters in the north-south direction, and the base of the lowest layer is about 2.1 meters high; the area of the middle layer of rammed foundation is smaller, square in shape, 50 meters long in both the east-west and north-south directions, and about 3.6 meters high; the top layer of the platform base is built with adobe bricks, square in shape, with an area of about 10 meters square, and the remaining height is 2.2 meters."[From: Luoyang Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism - Luoyang Baima Temple and Luoyang Ancient City Cultural Relics Management Office. Research on the Ancient City of Luoyang during the Han and Wei Dynasties. Page 16. Science Press. 2000.]

In the third issue of the journal "Archaeology" in 1981, an article titled "Brief Report on the Excavation of the Pagoda Foundation of Yongning Temple in the Northern Wei Dynas-

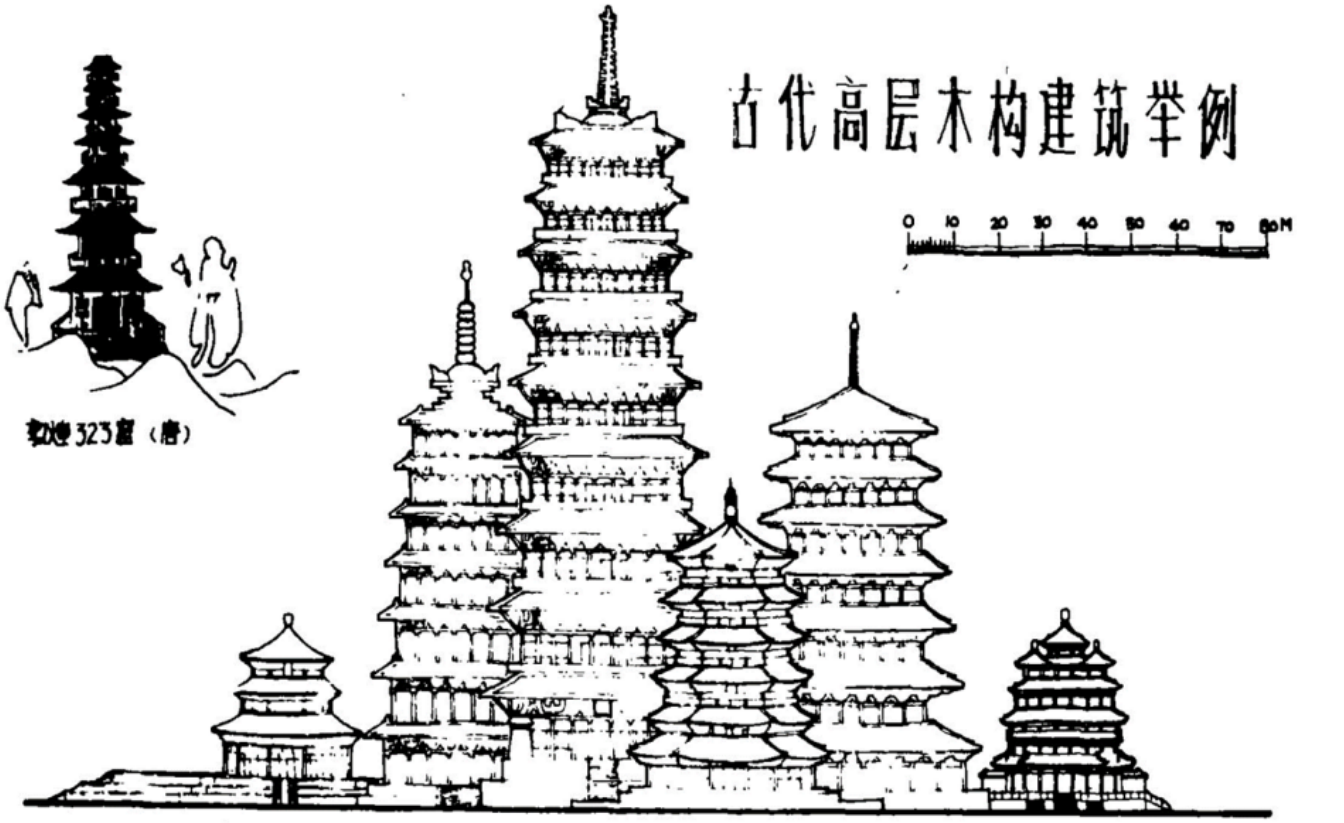


Figure - 1 The appearance of Yongning Temple Pagoda initially conjectured by the author (from «Ancient Architecture, Gardens and Technology», 1985 - 3)

ty" was published, revealing a bit more information: "In the central part of the lower rammed-earth foundation, an upper rammed-earth platform was built, and the four sides of the platform were paved and edged with bluestone. This was the foundation of the wooden pagoda built above the ground at that time. It was 2.2 meters high, and both the length and width were 38.2 meters. …… Some animal-shaped stone carvings were unearthed around the platform, and it is speculated that they should be components such as 'chi shou' (mythical animal heads) decorated around the platform. In the middle of each of the four sides of the platform, there was a'slow path'（慢道）."[From: Luoyang Municipal Bureau of Cultural Relics - Luoyang White Horse Temple and Luoyang Ancient City Cultural Relics Preservation Institute Research on the Northern Wei Luoyang Ancient City.Page 101. Science Press. 2000] The site plan has not been seen in the article.

What's important is that the "briefing" mentions: "In the 'Annotations to the Water Classic' by Li Daoyuan of the Northern Wei Dynasty, in the section on the Gu River（谷水）, it is recorded that the Yongning Temple's 'the base of the pagoda is fourteen zhang square'. If calculated according to the conversion of each chi in the Northern Wei Dynasty to 27.9 centimeters today, fourteen zhang should be equivalent to 39.06 meters today. The width of the base of the platform inlaid with bluestone actually excavated is 38.2 meters. The two are not much different, which fully shows that Li Daoyuan's description is relatively in line with the actual situation."[From: Luoyang Municipal Bureau of Cultural Relics - Luoyang White Horse Temple and Luoyang Ancient City Cultural Relics Preservation Institute Research on the Northern Wei Luoyang Ancient City. Page 103. Science Press.]

In the article "Explanation of the Restoration Sketch of the Yongning Temple Pagoda in Luoyang during the Northern Wei Dynasty" published by Mr. Yang Hongxun（杨鸿勋）in the 9th issue of "Cultural Relics"（文物） in 1992, it was the first paper to conduct a restoration study of the Yongning Temple Pagoda in a strict sense. The article presented the building plan based on the site excavation, and according to the logic of structure and shape, drew the cross - section and exterior perspective of the Yongning Temple Pagoda. Combining the known information that "the length of one chi in the early Northern Wei Dynasty = 27.881 cm" and the site dimensions, the author speculated: "The most likely situation is that the construction chi used in this project at that time was not the chi of the early Northern Wei Dynasty that we currently refer to, but a slightly shorter one. If we take fourteen zhang as the standard, that is, fourteen zhang is equal to 3820 cm, and when converting the chi used in this project at that time, then 1 chi = 27.285 cm. I think when discussing the restoration of this pagoda, we might as well adopt this measurement scale."[Yang Hongxun. Notes on the Reconstruction Sketch of the Pagoda of Yongning Temple in Luoyang, Northern Wei Dynasty. From Luoyang Cultural Relics Bureau - Luoyang Baima Temple Luoyang Ancient City Cultural Relics Conservation Institute. Research on the Northern Wei Luoyang Ancient City. Page 103.Science Press.2000]

This article is not only the earliest scientific restoration of this thousand-year-old ancient pagoda, but also the earliest attempt since the 1990s in the field of architectural history. This important idea involves inferring the possible rulers used in the original construction from the remains of ancient examples, and through speculating on the rulers, exploring the construction and restoration of the example in history.

In "Collected Papers on Architectural Archaeology by Yang Hongxun", the paper "Research on the Restoration of the Yongning Temple Pagoda in Luoyang during the Northern Wei Dynasty", which is a more detailed study of this topic, is included. In this article with a very in - depth train of thought, the author not only provides detailed archaeological plans, elevations, and sections of the Yongning Temple Pagoda site, but also makes a slight revision to the previous speculation that the possible unit of measurement for the Yongning Temple Pagoda was 27.285 centimeters: "Now, by equating the side length of the base, which is 38.20 meters in kind, with the 'fourteen zhang' recorded in the literature, we can obtain the unit of measurement used in building the pagoda at that time. One yingzao chi （营造尺）= 0.27285 meters. Discarding the decimal at the end and rounding it off, that is, one chi = 0.2729 meters. This unit of measurement can be used to infer the height of the pagoda in accordance with the literature."[Yang Hongxun. Research on the Restoration of Yongning Temple Pagoda in Luoyang, Northern Wei Dynasty. Proceedings of Yang Hongxun on Architectural Archaeology (Updated Edition). Page 334. Tsinghua University Press. 2008]

Another important article is "Exploration of the Restoration of the Yongning Temple Pagoda in Luoyang during the Northern Wei Dynasty" published by Ms. Zhong Xiaoqing（钟晓青）, a scholar at the Institute of Architectural History of the China Academy of Building Research, in the 5th issue of "Cultural Relics" in 1998. This is a research paper on the restoration of ancient architecture with highly admirable evidence and inferences. This article not only deeply analyzes the archaeological data, but also makes logical deductions and proofs in line with architecture and structure regarding the architectural dimensions of various parts of the pagoda base sorted out from the archaeological data, the dimensions of various components unearthed from the foundation site, as well as key data such as the first - floor plan of the pagoda, the distribution spacing of each circle of column grids, etc., and lists data tables. For the elevation of the pagoda, such as the pagoda height, the proportion of the pagoda body, the height of each floor, the column height, the height of the bracket set（铺作） and the height of the balcony（平坐）, etc., and the most difficult restoration of the framework of the Yongning Temple Pagoda based on the relevant ancient architectural remains of the same era, in - depth analysis and tabu-

lation are carried out. The thoroughness of its analysis and the meticulousness of its deductions can be regarded as a model work in the field of ancient architecture restoration research.

It is worth noting that the author also proposed here that the tower can be estimated and judged with a chi: “It is known that there are three lengths of chi in the Northern Wei Dynasty, namely 27.88 cm, 27.97 cm, and 27.59 cm in the early, middle, and late periods. Using these data to convert the side length of the tower base, it is 38.2 meters, which is 13.7, 13.66, and 12.91 zhang respectively. The result of conversion with the chi in the early period is relatively close to the ‘fourteen zhang square’ recorded in Commentary on the Waterways Classic, but it does not match the construction age of the tower. According to the actual situation, such an odd number should not be used when building the tower. The relationship between the ancient construction scale and the officially issued scale is still unclear at present. Therefore, it is considered to find the possible construction scale used at that time from the measured dimensions of the tower base. Through analysis, it is found that when converting the measured dimensions of the tower base, the bay of the tower body, and the unearthed components with 0.2727 meters/Wei chi（ 魏尺 ）, most of the obtained data are complete numbers and are consistent with the literature records.”[Zhong Xiaoqing. Discussion on the Restoration of Yongning Temple Pagoda in Luoyang in the Northern Wei Dynasty. Luoyang-Luoyang White Horse Temple Luoyang Ancient City Cultural Relics Preservation Center. Research on the Ancient City of Luoyang in the Northern Wei Dynasty. Page 562. Science Press. 2000] It can be seen that Zhong Xiaoqing also adopted the important method of using the data of ancient building remains to find the possible chi used in construction. The data “0.2727/Wei chi” she selected has a very small difference in length from the “0.2729/Wei chi” selected in Yang Hongxun’s article. In other words, both scholars hope to find a restoration chi that is conceptually more in line with the possible original state based on the basic data of “0.27285/Wei chi”.

Based on the existing archaeological data analysis, the two scholars each restored the plane size of the first floor of the tower body, the tower height, and the construction ruler used for building the tower. To a large extent, they are quite consistent. Both papers can be regarded as the most important achievements in the research and restoration of the Yongning Temple Tower.

2. Some doubts about the two papers

The papers of the two scholars not only confirm the high credibility of the historical literature records regarding the Yongning Temple Pagoda, but also, based on its architectural and structural logic, preliminarily restore the plane, height, and structure of each layer of the pagoda, thus generally reproducing the approximate appearance of this top wooden structure throughout history.

The main differences in the research of the two scholars lie in

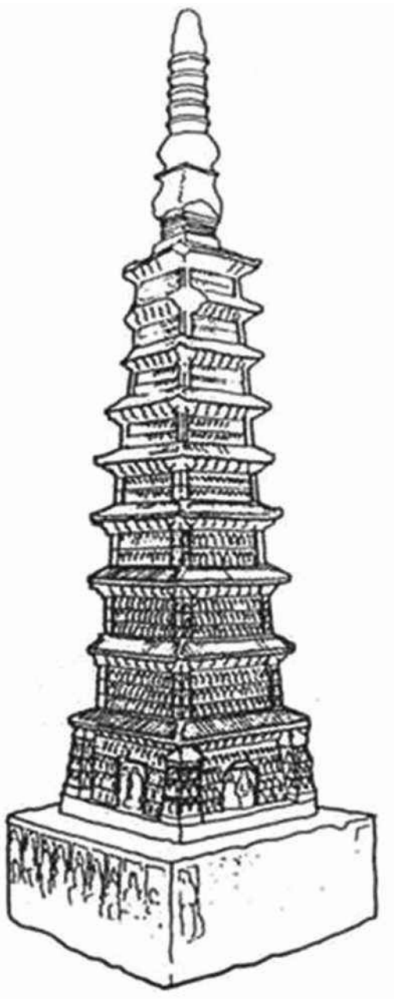


Figure - 2 The nine - story stone pagoda of Caotiandu in the Northern Wei Dynasty (from «Research on the Site of Luoyang City in the Han and Wei Dynasties», P204)

the tower’s structure and appearance. The structure and appearance of the tower speculated by Yang Hongxun seem to draw more on the shapes of small stone pagodas of the same era, such as the nine - storey stone pagoda of Caotiandu（曹天度） in the first year of Tian’an（天安） of the Northern Wei Dynasty (466 AD) (Figure - 2) and the tower originally housing the Northern Wei stone carvings in Chongfu Temple（崇福寺） in Shuoxian（朔县） County. Yang Hongxun hopes to rely on corresponding materials of the same era to prove his point.

Based on this background information, Yang Hongxun’s restoration concept of the tower is to adopt a “timber and earth hybrid structure”. Besides the large earthen structure in the center of the tower according to the site excavation, small towers seemingly made of bricks and stones are added to the four corners of each layer of the tower body, aiming to strengthen and support the main structure of the tower body. This brings a puzzling question: for such a high - rise wood-

en tower, if a small brick (or adobe) tower is added to each corner of each layer, not only is the construction extremely difficult, but also, what about the structural stability of the small towers hanging in mid - air on each layer? Can the load - bearing capacity of the wooden corner structure of the tower

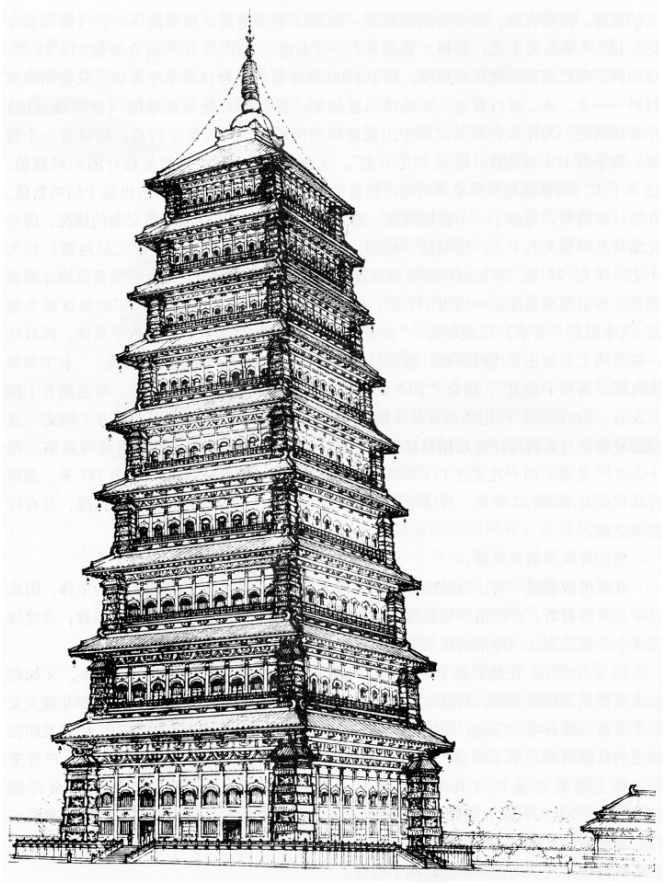


Figure - 3 The perspective of the restoration of Yongning Temple Pagoda by Mr. Yang (from «Research on the Site of Luoyang City in the Han and Wei Dynasties», P208)

body meet the requirements of this shape? Would the wooden Yongning Temple Tower, which was built almost half a century later than the nine - storey stone tower of Caotiandu, add additional brick (or adobe) structural shapes and loads at the corners of the roofs of each layer of the tower? To embody this "timber and earth hybrid" feature, Yang Hongxun also adopted pointed - arch - shaped doors and windows similar to those of brick - stone towers on each layer of the tower body, making the appearance of the tower body closer to that of a brick - stone tower rather than a wooden tower (Figure - 3).

Regrettably, in this article by Yang Hongxun in the past, the specific dimensions of the column heights, bracket sets, and balconies of each layer were not given at that time. Only an estimated value of "two zhang and eight chi for each layer" above the second floor was mentioned. His approach of adopting the same floor height for all floors above the second floor is contrary to the rhythmic pattern of the gradual decrease in the floor height of ancient pagodas in China, Japan, and Korea of the same era. At the same time, another characteristic of this restoration is the issue of the height of the first floor of the pagoda. As Yang Hongxun stated in the article: "The Record of the Monasteries of Luoyang" mentioned that 'the height of the pagoda is ninety zhang, and the spire is another ten zhang high, totaling one thousand chi: "This number is obviously based on the unit of 'ten zhang', and nine levels would be 'ninety zhang'. The author of this book, Yang Xuanzhi, overlooked the gradual contraction of the pagoda and roughly estimated the first level of the pagoda to be ten zhang and then multiplied it by nine to obtain this number."[Yang Hongxun. Research on the Restoration of Yongning Temple Pagoda in Luoyang, Northern Wei Dynasty. Proceedings of Yang Hongxun on Architectural Archaeology (Updated Edition). Page 337. Tsinghua University Press. 2008] Based on this judgment, the height of the first floor of the pagoda

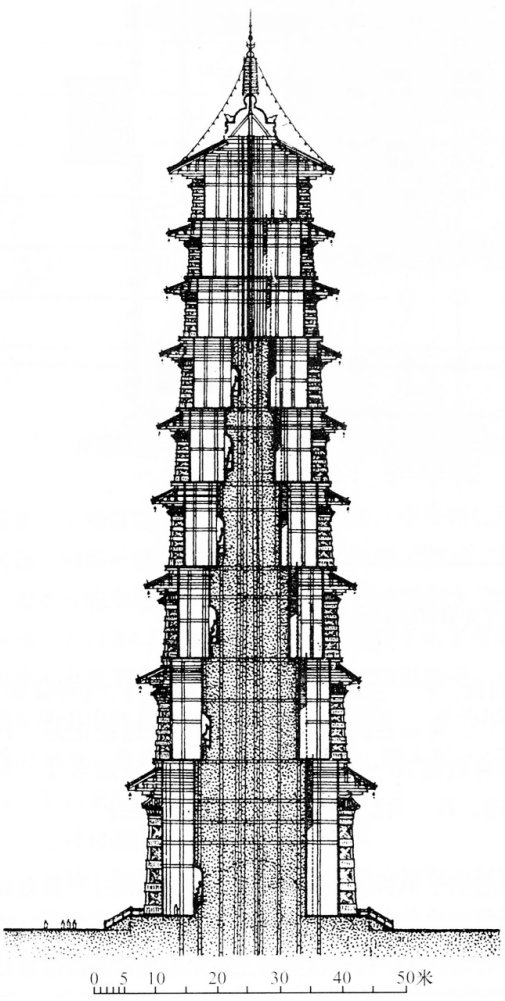


Figure - 4 The sectional view of the restoration of Yongning Temple Pagoda by Mr. Yang (from «Research on the Site of Luoyang City in the Han and Wei Dynasties», P206)

should be close to 10 zhang (27.29 meters) in the Northern Wei Dynasty chi. (Figure - 4) This speculative judgment is not inappropriate in itself. However, at that time, the north and south China were isolated, and the sources of large-sized timber in the North China and Guanzhong（关中） regions,

which were relatively close to Luoyang, were already scarce. If so many thick logs as high as more than 20 meters were used, it would undoubtedly greatly increase the difficulty of finding, cutting, and transporting the timber, and increase the construction difficulties. The designers and builders at that time should not have overlooked this issue.

From an academic perspective of architectural history, a large number of unearthed Han Dynasty funerary pottery towers reflect that wooden pavilions were quite common during the Han Dynasty. The Eastern Han Dynasty (25 - 220) pottery tower with a spire unearthed in recent years (Figure - 5) is also a multi - storey wooden - structured tower pavilion. The high platform for offering sacrifices to the gods（神明台） and the wooden building in the log-cabin style（井干楼） during the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC - 8 AD) were also early attempts at high - rise wooden structures. The Lingyun Pavilion（凌云阁）in Luoyang during the Cao Wei period (220 - 280 AD): “Previous historical records state that Emperor Ming of Wei built the Lingyun Pavilion and ordered Wei Dan（韦诞） to inscribe the plaque. The craftsmen accidentally nailed the blank plaque up first, so they put Wei Dan in a cage and hoisted him up with a rope to write the inscription. Wei Dan was twenty - five zhang above the ground.”[[Tang] Zhang Yanyuan. Records of Famous Paintings of Past Dynasties. Volume 9] Also, as quoted in “Yiwen Leiju（艺文类聚）”: “The ‘Shishuo（世说）’records that the pavilions and towers of the Lingyun Terrace were extremely exquisitely constructed. During construction, various materials were weighed first to ensure proper weight distribution before construction, resulting in no imbalance at all. Although the tower was towering, it often swayed with the wind. When Emperor Ming（明帝） of Wei climbed the tower, fearing its dangerous situation, he used large wooden timbers to support it. As a result, the tower immediately collapsed. Those who discussed this believed that this was because the original weight ratio was changed, causing the center of gravity to shift.”[[Tang] Ouyang Xun. Art and Literature Gathering. Volume 63. Residential Department III. Building] This incident occurred in the late Three Kingdoms period, several hundred years earlier than the middle of the Northern Wei Dynasty. At that time, the Lingyun Tower was already a high - rise wooden pavilion. Therefore, defining the Yongning Temple Pagoda as a ‘tamped - earth and wood hybrid structure’ and over - emphasizing the proportion and role of the tamped - earth structure may not be consistent with the development history of Chinese wooden - structured architecture.

The research of Zhong Xiaoqing’s thesis focuses on the timber structure, supplemented by the method of building a central column with adobe. In terms of structural details, it is closer to the construction method of timber - framed buildings in the Southern and Northern Dynasties, and its appearance is more like a timber - framed tower. However, there are two points similar to the arguments put forward in Yang Hongxun’s thesis: First, the height of the first floor is significantly



Figure - 5 The pottery tower with a wheel - like structure unearthed in Xiangyang from the Eastern Han Dynasty (from image.baidu.com)

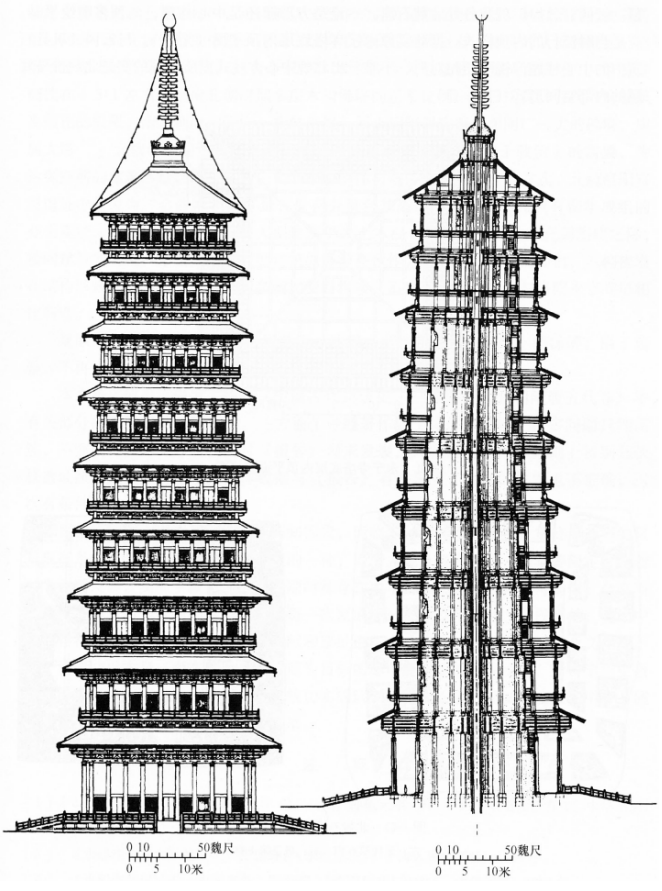


Figure - 6 The elevation and sectional view of the restoration of Yongning Temple Pagoda by Researcher Zhong (from «Research on the Site of Luoyang City in the Han and Wei Dynasties», P311)

higher, and the height of each floor above the second floor is significantly reduced. Second, the adobe central column not only has an indistinct taper, but also its height reaches the ground of the eighth floor. (Figure - 6)

3. Further Exploration of the Possible Original Appearance of the Yongning Temple Pagoda

Despite the above two doubts, I understand that the restoration of ancient buildings is an academic subject with great difficulty and risks. No matter how meticulous the deduction is, the results can only approximate the possible original appearance of ancient buildings to a certain extent, rather than the true original appearance. Therefore, with the research results of the two scholars, people generally accept the construction height and general form of this wooden pagoda recorded in the literature, which is already an account of history. Further research does not seem to be that necessary.

But if people hope to truly reproduce this building, things should be different. Around 2013, an entrepreneur engaged in the tourism industry approached the author, hoping to showcase the appearance of the Yongning Temple Pagoda in history in a tourism project. This put the author in a difficult situation. If based on Zhong Xiaoqing's paper, which is closer to the appearance of the wooden pagoda, at least in terms of the height ratio of each layer of the tower body and the overall appearance, it is not something that I fully accept. If based on Yang Hongxun's "civil - timber hybrid structure" appearance, it is even further from my understanding of the appearance form of the pagoda. Therefore, if it is necessary to truly reproduce the Yongning Temple Pagoda, it becomes inevitable to re - deliberate on the possible original appearance of this pagoda.

Based on this background, out of a sense of responsibility towards investors and this historical building, before the formal design, the author of this paper needs to conduct further research on the Yongning Temple Pagoda based on the papers of the previous two scholars. This is the main motivation for me to re - explore the possible original appearance of the Yongning Temple Pagoda.

First, let's analyze the substantive content of the existing papers of the two scholars again. This is an important foundation for the research of the author of this paper. In terms of the plane, especially Zhong Xiaoqing's paper, it provides a detailed description of the site conditions, the detailed dimensions of the tower base, and the components excavated from the site. The first - floor plan she drew is based on solid evidence, with detailed dimensions and rigorous argumentation, which is an important foundation for further research. The focus of this paper by the author is:

1. Based on the first-floor plan of Zhong Xiaoqing's thesis, I re-studie the plans of each floor, especially the inward recession of the outer eaves tower columns on each floor and the overall tapering caused thereby.

2. I further explore the decreasing rules of the column height of each layer and the height of the tower body.

3. I further ponders over the structural details of the wooden pagoda, such as the columns and lintels of each floor, the dougong brackets, the dougong brackets of the mezzanine（平坐斗栱）, and the distribution of the column network inside the pagoda after the adobe core column rises above.

4. I will conduct further research on the height and taper control of the adobe central core column.

In addition to the above four aspects, any details of the unearthed remains of the wooden pagoda and the structural basis of wooden structures of the same era that have been described in the papers of the previous two scholars will not be introduced repeatedly in this paper.

The purpose of this article is to provide builders with an appearance of the wooden pagoda that the author believes is closer to its original historical state. At the same time, it also hopes to conduct academic exploration. That is, this thesis aims to make new explorations into the possible structural and styling logic when the ancients built this high - rise wooden pagoda, and to re - explore the overall proportion control of the pagoda body, as well as the decreasing proportions of the height of each floor and the height of columns, in order to explain the author's doubts about the papers of the previous two scholars.

(1) Proportion Weighing of the Tower Body Based on the Number "Seven"

Regarding the restoration in Yang Hongxun's aforementioned paper, the tower body of the first floor is evidently too high. Although the tower of the first floor in Zhong Xiaoqing's paper is slightly lowered, it still appears relatively high. The common point of these two papers is that the height of the tower on the second floor is significantly reduced. The heights of the tower bodies of the upper floors either maintain a uniform height of 2.8 zhang or, although there is a slight decrease, the reduction rhythm is not obvious.

Chinese ancient pagodas, especially those remaining from the Northern Dynasties (386 - 581), the Sui Dynasty (581 - 618), and the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907). For pavilion-style pagodas, the height of each layer generally decreases in a regular pattern. That is, the height of the first layer of the pagoda is taken as a modular basis, and the height of each layer above the

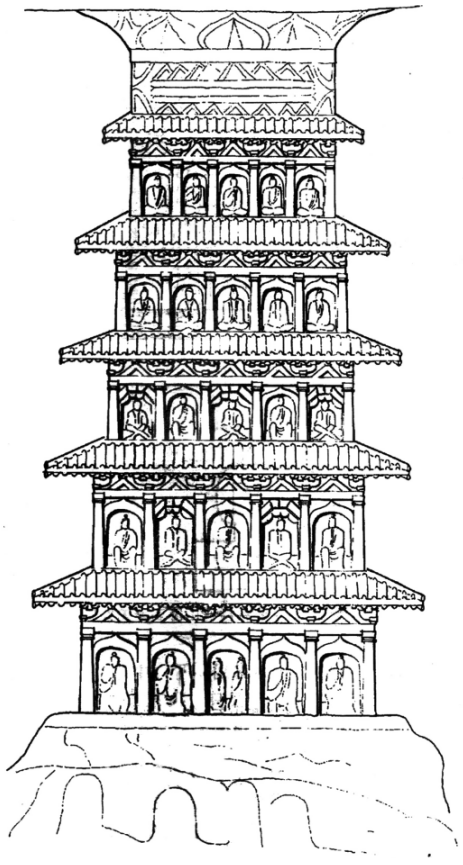


Figure - 7 The central tower pillar of Cave 39 in Yungang Grottoes (Fu Xinian, «History of Ancient Chinese Architecture», Volume II)



Figure - 8 The stone pagoda of the Northern Wei Dynasty and the Xuanzang Pagoda of Xingjiao Temple in the Tang Dynasty (Fu Xinian, «History of Ancient Chinese Architecture», Volume II)

second layer is reduced rhythmically. Many central pagoda columns and stone-carved relief pagodas in the Yungang（云冈） Grottoes during the Northern Wei Dynasty (Figure - 7) demonstrated this regular decreasing rhythm. For example, the nine-story stone pagoda of Caotiandu in the Northern Wei Dynasty. The Xuanzang（玄奘） Pagoda of Xingjiao Temple（兴教寺） in the early Tang Dynasty (Figure - 8), although it is a brick and stone pagoda imitating a wooden structure, also exhibits this rather rhythmic characteristic of the pagoda body proportion.

There are two exceptional cases: one is the multi-eaved pagoda（密檐塔）, such as the Songyue Temple（嵩岳寺） Pagoda on Songshan（ 嵩 山） Mountain, where the height of the first-story tower is very prominent; the other is that for some individual pavilion-style brick and stone pagodas, the first-story tower body is significantly taller, and the floor height of the second floor and above suddenly decreases. When viewed from a distance, it is slightly similar to a multi-eaved pagoda, such as the Xiangji Temple（香积寺） Pagoda in Xi'an.

According to Mr. Fu Xinian's （傅熹年）research, the early multi - storey wooden pagodas in China and Japan both demonstrated a strong concept of proportional balance. For example, the height of a certain storey of the pagoda was used as the basic unit of proportional balance for the height of the entire pagoda. More examples show that the ancients took the height of the columns of the outer eaves of the first storey of the pagoda as a base number to deliberate and control the height of the entire pagoda, so as to control the proportion of the tower body and the rhythm of the decreasing height of each storey as a whole.

Based on this, the author re-organizes the materials of the Yongning Temple Pagoda. Interestingly, in Li Daoyuan's description of the Yongning Temple Pagoda, two numbers are mentioned: "The base of the stupa is fourteen zhang square, and from the golden dew plate（金露槃） to the ground is forty-nine zhang." Both numbers happen to be multiples of 7. Can we guess that the designer might have divided the height of the entire pagoda into 7 sections, with each section being 7 zhang high, as the expansion modulus for the height of the entire pagoda? If so, the height of the first floor of the pagoda might be controlled within a size related to 7 zhang, as the base number for determining the height of each floor. From the second floor upwards, the height of each floor decreases regularly, forming an appropriate proportion and rhythm of the pagoda body's decrease.

In Mr. Fu's research, a phenomenon was mentioned: the elevation of the second - floor ground of some ancient pavilions and towers may be twice the height of the eave columns on the first floor. Based on this, half of the extended module of 7

zhang, that is, 3.5 zhang, could be set as the column height of the first - floor tower. To a certain extent, the number 3.5 can still be classified under the proportional control method based on the number "7".

The idea of controlling the height of the whole house based on the height of the eaves columns on the first floor is also reflected in "Treatise on Architectural Methods"(营造法式): "If the columns inside the hall and other buildings, their lengths are determined according to the pitching trend, with the lower eaves columns as the standard."[[Song] Li Jie. Treatise on Architectural Methods. Volume 5. Big Woodwork System II. Pillars] The so - called "taking the lower eaves columns as the standard" here is only for determining the height of the columns inside the hall and other buildings. However, considering that the lower - layer eaves columns in ancient wooden - structured buildings serve as a basic reference number in terms of structure and shape for the entire building, including multi - storey and high - rise buildings, it should be a kind of thinking that conforms to the construction logic of ancient Chinese wooden - structured buildings.

Starting from the second floor, based on the height of the eaves columns on the first floor, the height of the tower should be reduced regularly. The author initially tried to roughly estimate with a reduction rate of 5.5% for the height of each floor's columns compared to the columns of the lower floor, with the height of each floor's columns being reduced by 2.0 chi compared to the lower floor. In this case, the height of the columns on the first floor is 3.5 zhang, 3.3 zhang on the second floor, 3.1 zhang on the third floor, 2.9 zhang on the fourth floor, 2.7 zhang on the fifth floor, 2.5 zhang on the sixth floor, 2.3 zhang on the seventh floor, 2.1 zhang on the eighth floor, and 1.9 zhang on the ninth floor.

Suppose that the Dougong (bracket sets) adopt the size standard of the first-class material in the Northern Wei Dynasty. Since the chi (a unit of length) in the Northern Wei Dynasty was relatively short and the materials used for palaces and pavilions before the Tang Dynasty were relatively large, it seems reasonable to speculate that the height of the first-class material in the Northern Wei Dynasty might be 1.5 Northern Wei chi. Then, based on the form of the column-head Dougong (bracket sets), calculate the height difference from the top surface of the eave column to the top surface of the column of the upper mezzanine, and integrate the construction methods and heights of the mezzanine Dougong on each floor into a unified form to calculate its height value. Subsequently, add the height difference from the column head of each layer to the top surface of the mezzanine above it between the tower layer structures that decrease layer by layer. In this way, the elevation of the upper surface of the Liaoyan Fang (eave-supporting beam) of the column-head bracket set on the ninth floor accumulates to 462.25 chi. This height only has a difference of 27.75 chi from the 490 chi recorded by Li Daoyuan as the height below the Golden Dew Plate（金露

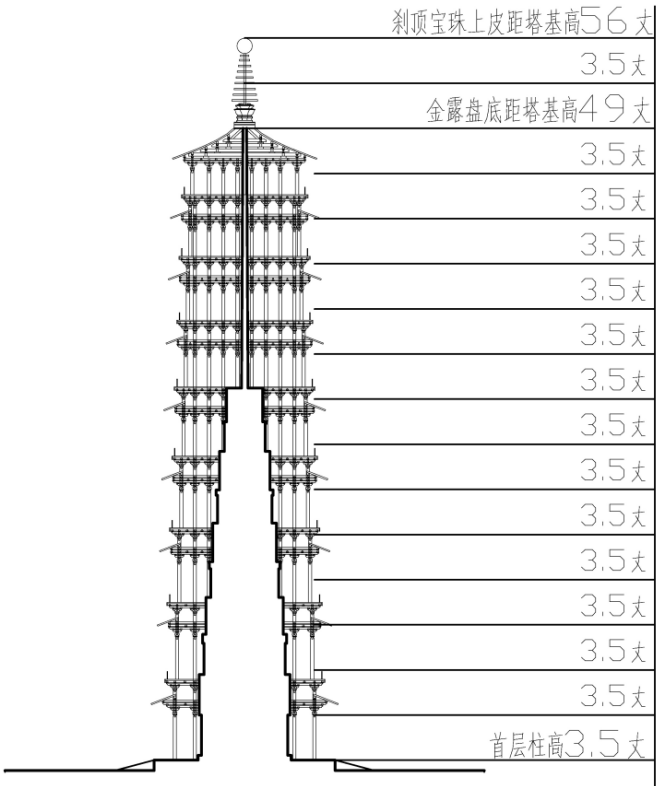


Figure - 9 The height proportion of Yongning Temple Pagoda based on the number «7» (self - drawn - 2013)

槃）. This figure seems to be regarded as the height of the roof structure's pitch of the tower on the ninth floor. Based on this analysis, the author proposes a basic proportion of the tower body height of the Yongning Temple Pagoda, with 3.5 zhang as the height of the first-floor columns and 7.0 zhang as the expansion modulus. (Figure - 9)

(2) The problem of the tapering of the tower body

The tapering of the tower body is a problem that is difficult to solve by logical judgment. Initially, I noticed a characteristic of the first - floor plan of the tower: there are 9 standard bays in the outer-eave column network on each side, with a column spacing of 1.1 zhang per bay, totaling 9.9 zhang. In addition to these 9 standard bays, there is a small end - bay (the rooms at the two ends of the eleven - bay arrangement) added at each corner, and the column spacing of the small end - bay is approximately 4.5 chi.

I believe that it is probably not a coincidence that the width of each of the nine standard rooms is set at 1.1 zhang. It might be a deliberate design choice. The most likely reason is to associate the tower's plane with the number "99", which is related to the double nine. There may be a possibility that the designer hoped to maintain this dimension, symbolizing the supremacy of yang（阳） numbers（odd number）, up to the top floor of the tower. In this way, only the 4.5 chi of the two end rooms on each side of the first floor need to be gradually reduced inward layer by layer, eventually disappearing

on the ground of the ninth floor, thus ensuring that the ninth floor of the tower maintains a scale of "9.9 zhang" on each of the four sides.

Based on this thinking, I drew the cross-section and elevation of the tower. The result was that the overall shape of the tower had a relatively small tapering, appearing slightly bloated. This seemingly logical but overly naive idea of the tower's tapering was obviously inappropriate. However, relating the overall width of the top floor of the tower to the yang number "nine" was still a consideration that needed to be incorporated. In further research, the author also envisioned the overall width of the top floor to be "8.1 zhang", which conforms to the number "9×9" (九九). If so, starting from the first floor of the tower, the width of each floor would be reduced inward by 1.725 chi. From the first floor to the top floor, the total length of the inward tapering on each side was 13.5 chi, and a total of 27 chi on both sides. This tapering slope seemed to be generally in line with the proportion of the ancient tower's shape.

(3) The height and taper of the adobe central pillar and the central pillar of the tower body

There were obvious differences in the presentation of the construction method of the adobe tower core column in the papers of the two previous scholars regarding restoration. In Yang Hongxun's paper, the adobe column had a distinct taper, and its highest point ended at the floor of the seventh layer. In Zhong Xiaoqing's paper, the adobe column appeared rather tall and straight, seemingly extending the remaining adobe central platform on the site ground upwards to the floor of the eighth layer, with only a slight taper. Above the eighth layer, the adobe tower core column in the central part was even extended.

Even without considering the materials, when observed solely from the structural perspective, this kind of tall building with nearly identical upper and lower cross-sections is inherently unstable. The adobe central column, apart from being relatively easy to construct, does not have many advantages when compared with the structure of the rammed earth central column. The ancients understood the principle of tapering in the construction of earth structures very early. Even for the most stable earth structures, such as rammed earth city walls, obvious tapering is required.

As stated in the "Treatise on Architectural Methods" (营造法式): "The method of building a city wall: for every 40 feet in height, the thickness should be increased by 20 feet. That is, it is smaller at the top and larger at the bottom, and the contraction ratio at the top is half of the height of the city wall. If the height of the city wall is increased by one chi, then the thickness of the lower part of the city wall should be increased by another chi, and the width of the top of the city wall is equivalent to half of the height of the city wall."[[Song] Li Jie. Treatise on Architectural Methods. Volume 3. Haozhai system. City] The thickness of the base of the city wall is 1/3 more than its height, and the thickness at the top after tapering is equivalent to 1/2 of the thickness of the base. A similar situation also occurs in earthen walls. As mentioned in the section on exposed walls in the "Treatise on Architectural Methods"（营造法式）: "For any wall exposed above the ground, if the height of each wall is one zhang, then the thickness of the wall is half less than the height, and the width of the tapering part at the top of the wall is one-fifth less than the height."[[Song] Li Jie. Treatise on Architectural Methods. Volume 3. Haozhai system. City] From this, it can be seen that the ancients knew very early on that in order to ensure the stability of earthen structures, they should have a distinct tapering shape with a larger bottom and a smaller top.

Or we can analyze it from another perspective, by analyzing the possible original volume of the masonry of this tower. Yang Hongxun's paper mentioned: "The 'Luoyang County Annals' compiled in the 10th year of Emperor Qianlong's reign in the Qing Dynasty (1745 AD) mistook the site of the Yongning Temple Pagoda, which was '6 zhang high', for the 'Jingling（静陵） Mausoleum of Emperor Zhi （质帝） of the Han Dynasty.'" It can be seen that the height of the soil pile at the site of the Yongning Temple Pagoda is about 6 zhang. Calculating based on the length of the chi in the Qing Dynasty and converting it to the length of the chi in the present day, the height of the soil pile at this site is about more than 18 meters. Taking this base as a square with a side length of 40 meters, if we assume that the soil pile is a cube, the volume of the 18 - meter - high soil pile is approximately nearly 28,000 cubic meters. However, since the soil pile should be a square - pointed conical mound with a smaller top and a larger bottom, the actual volume of the soil pile will be significantly smaller than this value. For example, it may be only around 25,000 cubic meters?

From the Northern Wei Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, if there was no large-scale excavation near the site of Yongning Temple Pagoda, this earthen mound, about 6 zhang high, was formed by the accumulation of the central pillar of the adobe materials of the pagoda after it collapsed. It may also include the remnants of some components of the tower body and the rubble of the roofs of each floor. By this calculation, the actual volume of the original central pillar of the tower is likely not to exceed 24,000 cubic meters. If, as previously speculated by Yang Hongxun and Zhong Xiaoqing, the original central pillar of the tower extended to the ground of the eighth floor, and calculated with the bottom side of its adobe central pillar being about 20 meters and the height being 85 meters, the volume would be at least 34,000 cubic meters. The difference between the two is nearly 10,000 cubic meters.

It can be seen from this that, based on the volume of the remaining earth mounds during the Qianlong period (from 1736 to 1795), with a base of 20 meters square, the height of the adobe central pillar would not exceed around 60 meters, that

is, it would reach the limit when it reaches approximately the ground of the sixth - floor tower. For the tower body above the sixth floor, it is likely that an ordinary wooden tower body was used, supplemented by a central wooden pillar. The structural form is more similar to the construction method of wooden pagodas during the Asuka period in Japan, which was influenced by the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420 - 589 AD) in China.

Therefore, it can be seen that Yang Hongxun's understanding of the adobe central pillar in the pagoda seems to be more reasonable. In the restoration of this paper, I has made some minor revisions based on this feature: First, extend the adobe central pillar to the ground of the sixth - floor of the pagoda; Second, for the central pillar made of adobe materials, make step - backs that shrink layer by layer to ensure the stability of the central pillar. However, in order to ensure the integrity of the space inside each floor of the pagoda, this step - back method requires that the four walls of the central pillar on each floor still maintain an upright form, so that people at that time could build concave niches on the walls.

Similarly, with the setbacks on each floor, the space inside the tower gradually expands. On the floors above the sixth floor, an indoor space of a wooden pagoda with a central pillar in the true sense appears. This should be in line with the internal logic of the original builders' high - profile promotion of this super - high - rise Buddhist pagoda. Of course, statues of Buddha can still be arranged around the central wooden pillar inside the room.

The subsequent question is, with the expansion of the space inside the tower, how should the column grid around the central column be arranged? Zhong Xiaoqing's paper directly extends the square columns inside the tower, which have an adobe structure at the bottom layer as the center, to the ninth floor of the tower. In other words, the square - section columns of the central tower column are regarded as part of the complete wooden structure system of the tower body.

I believe that the square columns buried in the adobe tower core column play a role of strengthening the adobe tower core column to a greater extent. It is equivalent to the "chou ren" wall（抽紝墻） in the ancient rammed earth wall, or the concept of adding yacha wood（夜叉木） in the wall. If the upper load is directly transmitted to these square columns, it is difficult to ensure that the columns of each layer are completely vertical and structurally connected to each other. Instead, lateral pressure will be generated in the adobe tower core column, which is even less conducive to the structural integrity of the tower core column.

In addition, judging from the fact that the column spacing of the outer-eave columns around the tower is not aligned with the column grid distribution of the square columns in the adobe material tower core columns, this understanding will also be strengthened: the square columns buried in these tower core columns are mainly for the structural reinforcement of the adobe tower core columns. With the expansion of the space on each floor of the tower, whenever new columns can be implanted inside the tower, from the perspective of structure and architectural logic, the constructors will surely align the inner columns of the tower body with the outer-eave columns of the corresponding bay of the tower body to ensure the reasonable connection and firm stability of the upper structure. At this time, as long as the craftsmen take certain measures to strengthen the column foundation on the ground of the new tower floor, they can set up the inner columns of the tower corresponding to the outer-eave columns. The load of their weight will be transmitted downward through the thick adobe masonry below, and there is no need to necessarily correspond to the square wooden columns in the adobe masonry.

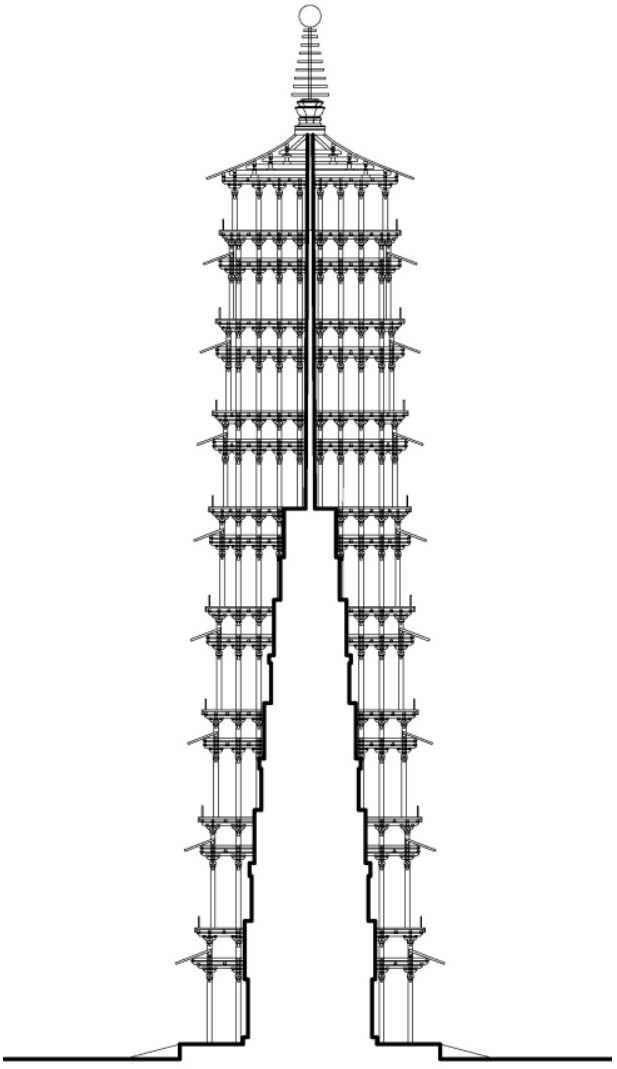


Figure - 10 The sectional restoration of Yongning Temple Pagoda based on the number «7» (self - drawn - 2013)

If the craftsmen had to extend the column grid inside the central column upwards, then the inner and outer column grid

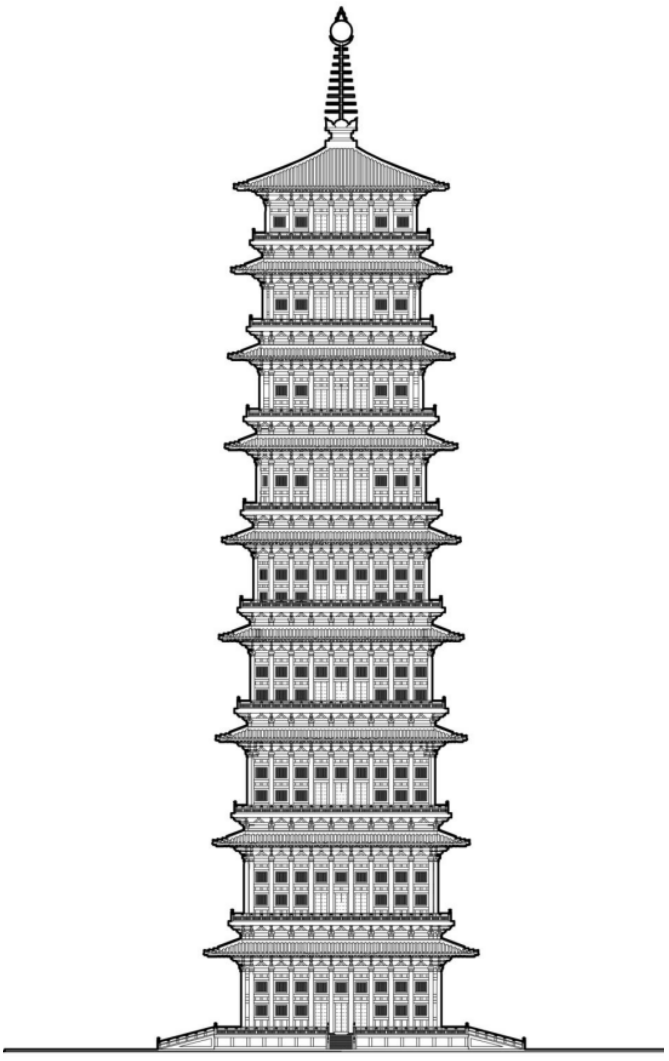


Figure - 11 The elevation restoration of Yongning Temple Pagoda based on the number «7» (self - drawn - 2013)

systems of the wooden structure on the upper part of the tower would also need to be continuously adjusted, resulting in a more complex structural stress state. This perhaps should not have been the choice of ancient craftsmen.

Based on this analysis, I drew the sectional and elevation views of the Yongning Temple Pagoda (Figure - 10, Figure - 11). And the author wrote the article "A Re - study on the Restoration of the Yongning Temple Pagoda in Luoyang during the Northern Wei Dynasty", which was published in "Research Papers on Ancient Chinese Buddhist Architecture" edited by the author and published by Tsinghua University Press in 2014.

4.Re - research Based on the Law of Negation of Negation

However, I still has some unresolved doubts about the above-mentioned research. After years of repeated thinking, I increasingly feel that it is necessary to further explore the proportions of each layer of this historical tower and the possible symbolic meanings it contains. Even if it is not for the constructive reproduction of this ancient tower, from the perspective of academic research alone, it is still necessary to further revise my previous research, in the hope of making a more in - depth exploration of the possible original appearance of the Yongning Temple Tower. This is the main theme of this article of mine.

Things have returned to the status of the number "nine" representing the supremacy of yang numbers (positive numbers or odd numbers). As can be known from historical materials, the ruling class of the Northern Wei Dynasty had a special affection for the number "nine". "The History of the Wei Dynasty" （魏书） states: As one of the twenty-five sons of the Yellow Emperor, " Changyi (昌意), the youngest son of the Yellow Emperor was enfeoffed in the land of the north. His fief had a large Xianbei Mountain （大鲜卑山）, and his tribe took 'Xianbei' as its title. … After sixty-seven generations, when Emperor Zhicheng whose personal name was Maoli (志 成皇帝讳毛立) ascended the throne, he was intelligent, bright, and rich in military strategies. People near and far respected him. He governed thirty-six fiefs and had ninety-nine large surname tribes. His power and influence shocked the tribes in the north, and none did not submit."[[Northern Qi Dynasty] Wei Shu. Wei Shu. Volume 1. Emperor Ji-I. Preface Ji]

After the establishment of the Northern Wei Dynasty, there was an idea of building the Mingtang（明堂）. "At the beginning, during the Yongping（永平） and Yanchang（延昌） reigns of Emperor Shizong (世宗元恪), there was an intention to build the Mingtang. However, among those discussing the matter, some believed that the Mingtang should have five chambers, while others thought it should have nine chambers. Successive years of famine ensued, so the plan to build the Mingtang was put on hold. By this time, the matter of building the Mingtang was discussed again, and an imperial edict was issued to adopt the plan of building five chambers. When Yuan Yi（元议） was in charge of government affairs, it was then rebuilt into nine chambers."[[Northern Qi Dynasty] Wei Shou. Wei Shu. Volume 108-2. Zhi XI. Li IV-II] In addition, the people of the Northern Wei Dynasty highly esteemed the music of the Rites of Zhou. "The Gong scale is the foundation （黄钟为宫）, the Diao scale is the top note（大吕为角）, the Taocu scale is the third note（太蔟为徵）, and the Yingzhong scale is the bottom note（应钟为羽）. Using musical instruments such as the Lugu drum（路鼓） and Lutao drum （路鼗）, as well as Bamboo tubes of the Yinzhu (阴竹之管), and stringed instruments such as the Qin（琴） and Se（瑟） made from materials produced in Longmen. Playing the music praising the Nine Virtues and performing the Dance of the Nine Shao. The music is played with multiple modulations, and in this way, it is possible to sacrifice to the ancestors and spirits (expressing respect for the ancestors and spirits)."[[Northern Qi Dynasty] Wei Shu. Wei Shu. Volume 109. Zhi

XIV. Le-V]

In fact, the ancients emphasized the "prestige of the supreme nine and five", and even the Northern Wei people, who adhered to Han culture were no exception. And the Northern Wei people, who inclined towards Han culture, were no exception. As stated in "The History of the Wei Dynasty"(魏书): "The First Emperor ascended to the throne at the number nine and five, initiating the distant governance and rectifying chaos to establish the state. Even when the sun was high in the sky, he still had no time to rest."[[Northern Qi Dynasty] Wei Shou. Wei Shu. Volume 21. Biography No. 9. Six Kings of Xianwen]Regarding the construction of the Mingtang (明堂), the Northern Wei people were also very troubled by the concept of the nine and five: "After planning to start the construction of the Mingtang and gathering scholars to discuss its system, the concept of the nine and five remained unresolved for a long time."[[Northern Qi Dynasty] Wei Shu. Wei Shu. Volume 32. Biography 20. Biography of Feng Yi]

Most likely for this reason, when the Yongning Temple Pagoda with nine stories was built in Luoyang, the capital of the Northern Wei Dynasty in the middle period, five-story pagodas were also constructed in various prefectures within the territory: "Empress Dowager Ling was enthusiastic about projects such as building temples. In the capital, she built Buddhist temples like Yongning Temple and Taishanggong Temple（太上公寺）, consuming a great deal of money and manpower. Five-story pagodas were also built in various prefectures outside the capital."[[Northern Qi Dynasty] Wei Shu. Wei Shu. Volume 19. Biography No. 7. Twelve Kings of Jingmu. Ren Cheng King] Building nine-story pagodas in the capital and five-story pagodas in various prefectures, this practice seems to be in line with the numbers "nine" and "five". It can be inferred from this that the "nine" here is undoubtedly a concept that needs to be emphasized deliberately, so that its connotation has a full symbolic meaning.

Regarding this point, it can also be glimpsed from some basic elements of this tower. For example, the tower has nine stories. As Yang Xuanzhi described: "There is a nine-story stupa in the middle, built with wood, reaching a height of ninety zhang."[[Northern Wei Dynasty] Yang Zhi. Luoyang Jialan Ji. Volume 1. In the city] This strong emphasis on the number "nine" may not just be Yang's personal speculation, but perhaps also something passed down among the ordinary people in Luoyang at that time. Even Li Daoyuan, who was rigorous in his records of the tower's height, specifically mentioned two numbers related to "nine": "a nine-story stupa" and "from the Golden Dew Basin to the ground is forty-nine zhang." It can perhaps be guessed whether the height below the spire being controlled at the value of "forty-nine zhang" also contains the meaning of conforming to the yang number "nine". This is unknown.

There are two other phenomena related to the number "nine" in the Yongning Temple Pagoda. Firstly, on the ground - floor

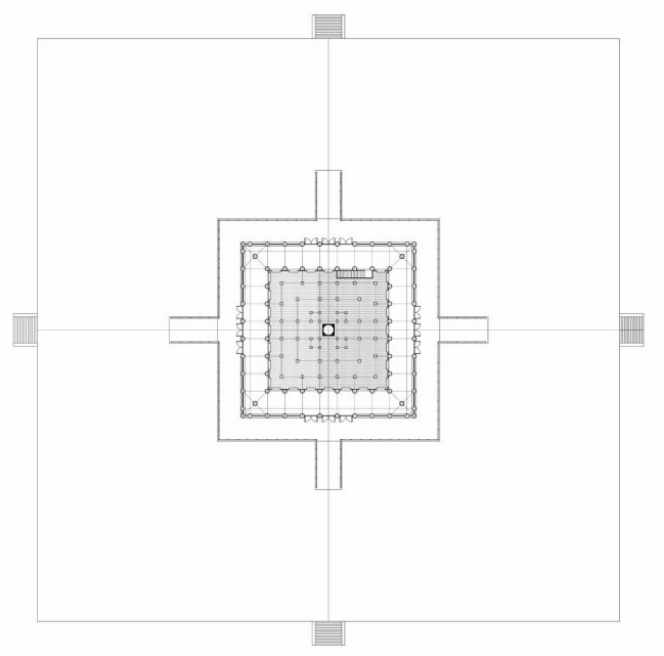


Figure - 12 The speculation of the first - floor plan of Yongning Temple Pagoda (self - drawn)

plan of the pagoda, although there are two small end - bays at both ends of each side, making it appear as eleven bays on the elevation, the standard bays are nine in number; (Figure - 12). Secondly, for its standard bays, based on the length of the ruler deduced from the dimensions of the archaeological site, the width of each bay is 1.1 zhang. Excluding the two small end - bays on both sides which have the significance of structural reinforcement, the total width of the nine standard bays is 9.9 zhang. The column - spacing between the two end - bays at both ends of each side on the ground - floor plan and the adjacent bay is approximately 4.5 chi, so the sum of the widths of the two end - bays is also 9 chi. The total width of the ground - floor elevation is 10.8 zhang, which is exactly 12 times of "9 chi", that is, an integer multiple of the number "9".

In my previous research, although it was noted that the total width of the standard bays on the first floor was "9.9 zhang", in the initial speculation, I was overly persistent in applying this value to the ninth - floor plan of the tower, or simply changing the ninth - floor plan to a total width of "8.1 zhang" to match the yang number "9". At that time, the key judgment focused on the tower base width of 14 zhang and the height of the tower body from below the golden disk to 49 zhang. The attention and emphasis on the number "7" between the two were regarded as an important reference system for the restoration of the tower body.

In other words, for this magnificent nine-story pagoda that has impressed through the ages, if we were to select a symbolic number that would particularly appeal to the ruler of that time, would it be more in line with the original intention of the pagoda builders to choose the number "9" or the number "7"? In fact, this is a question that requires further

consideration. This question has also caused me to be rather conflicted for a while.

(1) Re - evaluate the proportion of the tower body based on the number "nine"

Any restoration research on ancient architecture is carried out based on limited documentary and archaeological materials. It is a hypothetical attempt to deduce the possible original appearance of ancient architecture following certain scientific and cultural logic. Therefore, each research result is only an approximation to the original state of the building. This approximation is more like a process. In any case, modern people's restoration research cannot achieve a completely true and perfect restoration of the original form of ancient architecture. Each research is only a deepening of the original state of the building in terms of its logical consistency based on a series of logical deductions. In other words, for each restoration research, if its logical consistency is sufficient and reasonable, the restored form has certain rationality and reference value for understanding the original state of the building.

That is to say, the experiment of ancient architecture restoration itself has a hypothesis nature based on scientific significance. To a large extent, the results of its research are also difficult to simply deny or affirm. Each restoration study can be regarded as an exploratory deepening of previous existing research, or a re - observation and re - exploration from different perspectives. In other words, a restoration study that has accumulated relatively sufficient data and made relatively in - depth logical judgments has only, compared with previous similar studies, possibly taken a small step forward in understanding the original state of the architecture.

In addition to raising several doubts about the existing research, the above text also analyzes the unresolved dilemmas in my research. That is, whether the number "seven" or the number "nine" should be used as the basic reference element for the restoration research of the Yongning Temple Pagoda. Previously, starting from the number "seven", the height of the eaves columns on the first floor was set at 3.5 zhang, and the height of the columns on each floor was gradually reduced with an appropriate reduction rate, so that the height of the eaves columns on the top floor was reduced to 1.9 zhang. Although this is also an acceptable column height dimension, it seems to have no relation to the number "seven" or "nine". The proportion of the tower body decreasing according to such rules does not seem to be quite appropriate.

If we change our way of thinking and focus on the symbolic pursuit of the number "nine", in the hope of matching the series of numbers that seem to be no coincidence. These numbers include the 9 - storey tower height mentioned above, the sum of the widths of 9 standard bays being "9.9 zhang", the column spacing of the end bays on both sides of the first - floor plane being "4.5 chi", and the sum of the two being "9.0 chi". The overall width of the first floor is 10.8 zhang, which is exactly 12 times "9 chi". Then, perhaps we can make a slight adjustment to the speculated tower - body expansion modulus. That is, instead of "7 zhang", we change it to "7.2 zhang" which is in line with the number "9". This might be a potentially reasonable attempt.

If this is the case, I can make two adjustments: First, set the height of the eaves columns on the first floor to 7.2/2, that is, 3.6 zhang. Based on this column height, the height of each layer of columns is slightly reduced by a larger margin compared to the lower layer. For example, control the reduction rate to be around 0.93. Simply put, each layer of eaves columns is 2.25 chi shorter in height than the layer below it. Thus, the heights of the eaves columns of each layer are obtained as follows:

First floor: 3.6 zhang

Second floor: 3.375 zhang

Third floor: 3.15 zhang

Fourth floor: 2.925 zhang

Fifth floor: 2.7 zhang

Sixth floor: 2.475 zhang

Seventh floor: 2.25 zhang

Eighth floor: 2.025 zhang

Ninth floor: 1.8 zhang

To maintain the internal harmony of the decreasing tower height in terms of structural dimensions and to ensure the stability of the wooden structure in the upper part of the tower, no reduction is made between each layer of the tower body and the balcony（平坐） on the layer above it. Between the columns of each balcony and the columns of the tower body below, the "forked column construction method"（叉柱造） is adopted, with the upper and lower columns aligned. The tower body and the balcony maintain consistency in structure.

For each upper layer, except for the outer columns, the inner columns of the tower body still adopt the overlapping column construction method with the columns above and below aligned. Only the outer columns around the tower are retracted inwards, and the retraction rhythm is consistent with the rhythm of the decreasing height of the outer columns, that is, each side of each layer is retracted inwards by 2.25 chi. As a result, the overall width of the elevation of each layer is reduced by 4.5 chi compared to the layer below. From this, the overall width of the elevation of each layer can be obtained:

First floor: 10.8 zhang (9×1.2)

Second floor: 10.35 zhang (9×1.15)

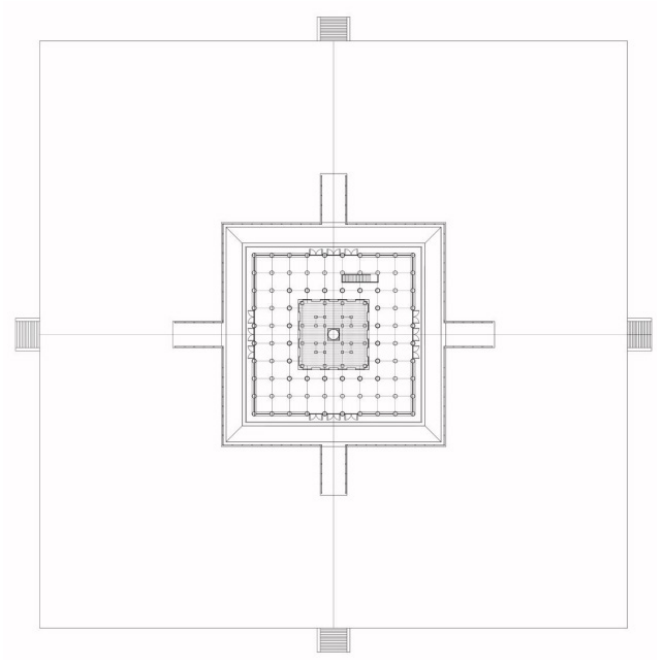


Figure - 13 The speculation of the third - floor plan of Yongning Temple Pagoda (self - drawn)

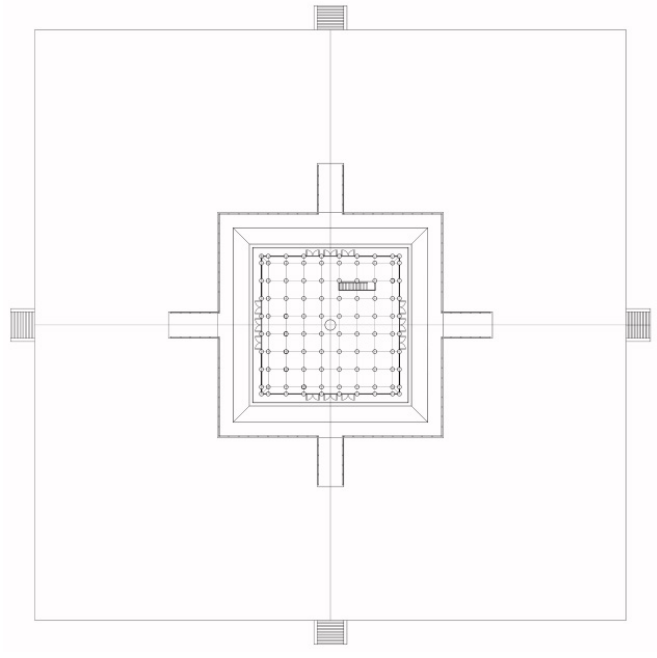


Figure - 14 The speculation of the sixth - floor plan of Yongning Temple Pagoda (self - drawn)

Third floor: 9.9 zhang (9×1.1)

Fourth floor: 9.45 zhang (9×1.05)

Fifth floor: 9.0 zhang (9×1.0)

Sixth floor: 8.55 zhang (9×0.95)

Seventh floor: 8.1 zhang (9×0.9)

Eighth floor: 7.65 zhang (9×0.85)

Ninth floor: 7.2 zhang (9×0.8)

The column heights of each floor and the overall width of the facade obtained in this way have many dimensions that coincide with the number "nine". Not only are the column heights of the first, fifth, and ninth floors exact multiples of 9 chi, but the overall widths of the facades of the first, third (Figure - 13), fifth, seventh, and ninth floors are also exact multiples of 9 chi. For other floors such as the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth floors, the overall widths of their facades can have a relatively regular proportional relationship with the number "9". Moreover, the adobe central column extends upward to the floor of the sixth floor, making the sixth floor present a typical wooden pagoda form with a central column (Figure - 14). And the ninth floor, that is, the top floor, exactly uses "7.2 zhang", an extended modulus of the tower body height, as the dimension of the entire facade width. (Figure - 15)

In other words, the rate of decrease in the height of columns on each floor and the rate of inward contraction of the eave columns on each floor not only echo each other but also contain a certain internal sense of rhythm and cadence. Moreover, there is always a certain fit with the number "nine". Therefore, this treatment of proportional decrease seems likely to be closer to the choice of the ancients based on the symbolic appeal of the yang number "nine". (Figure - 16, Figure - 17)

(2) Bracket sets on columns（柱上铺作）, mezzanine（平坐）, and the rise of the top floor

The two academic papers mentioned previously set the restoration scales as 0.2729 meters per Northern Wei chi and

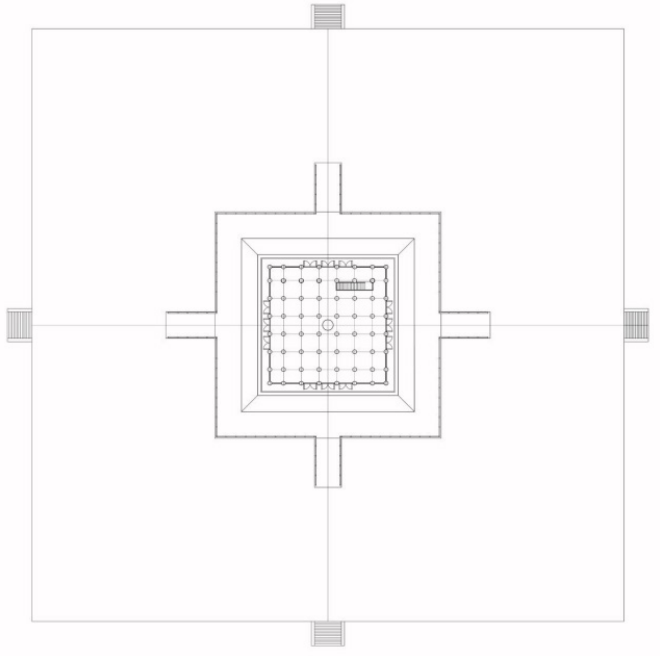


Figure - 15 The speculation of the ninth - floor plan of Yongning Temple Pagoda (self - drawn)

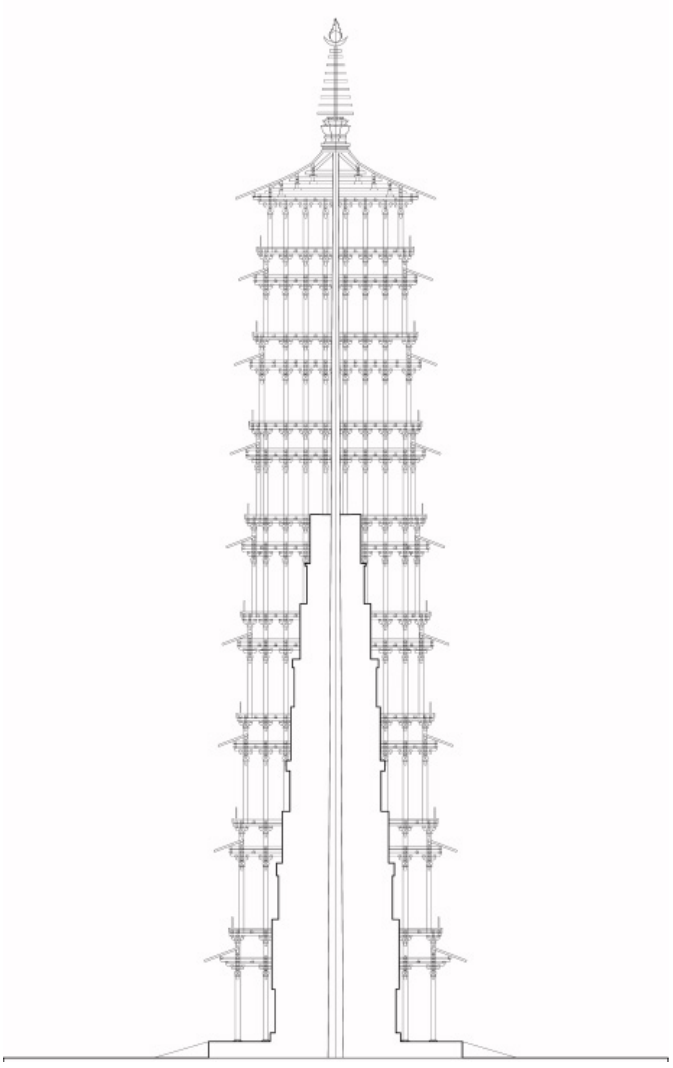


Figure - 16 The sectional restoration of Yongning Temple Pagoda based on the number «9» (self - drawn - 2021)

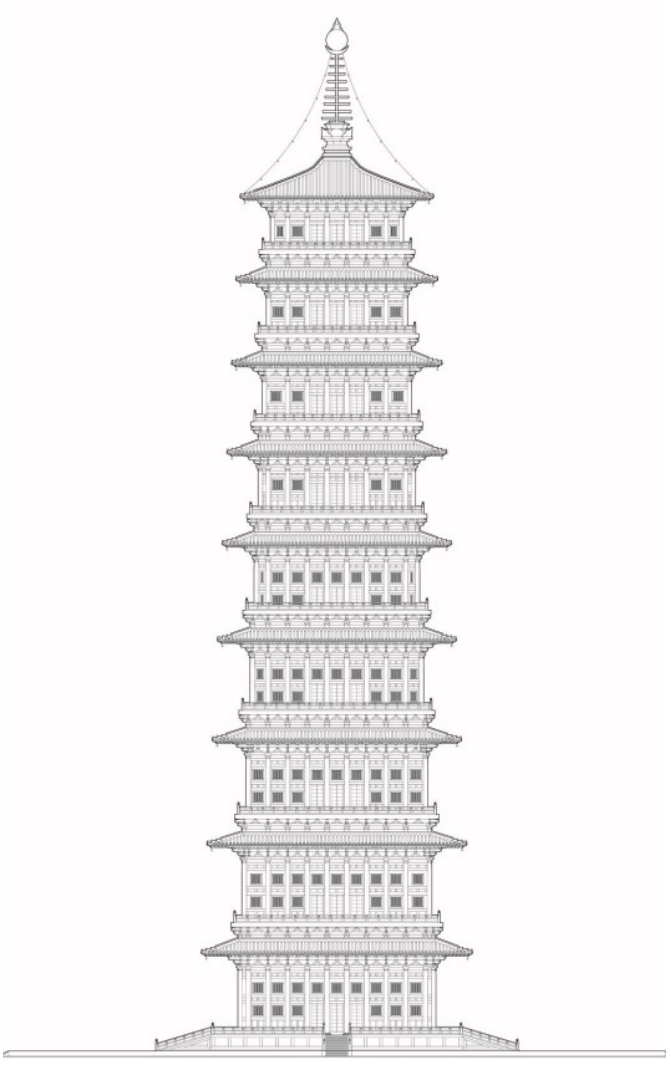


Figure - 17 The elevation restoration of Yongning Temple Pagoda based on the number «9» (self - drawn - 2021)

0.2727 meters per Northern Wei chi respectively. Based on the measured size of the site's platform base, which is 38.2 meters, and by calculating according to the side length of the platform base, which is 14 zhang as recorded in historical documents, the closest size is approximately 0.272857 meters per Northern Wei chi. In fact, the last digits of these values have reached the millimeter or even a smaller magnitude. Therefore, regardless of which of the two lengths of the Northern Wei chi is adopted, the difference in the conversion of modern measurement values is negligible. Thus, the author adopted the value of the chi length that is closer to the size calculated from the measured data, which is also the median of the chi lengths used by the previous two scholars for restoration, that is, 0.2728 meters per Northern Wei chi. The author took this value as the basic chi length for this restoration research.

Like the viewpoints in Ms. Zhong Xiaoqing's paper, the author also believes that during the Northern Wei Dynasty, the size of building materials was relatively large. Calculating with the first-class material being 1.5 chi, the height of the first-class material at that time was 0.409 meters. For the building materials of wooden structures before the Tang Dynasty, this is a height scale of materials that should be acceptable. Further adopting this view may also help people understand: why did people in the Song Dynasty divide the material value into 15 fen, and whether there was a situation from the Wei and Jin Dynasties to the Sui and Tang Dynasties where the unit of measurement was relatively small, but the building materials used were relatively large, thus forming the rules of the material division system? We don't know at present.

The author sets the bracket sets on each column head as three-jump hidden-heart（三跳偷心） type. On the head of the third jump, no linggong (令栱) is installed, and it directly supports the laoyanfang (橑檐方). The bracket sets of the mezzanine are single-jump hidden-heart type, and they support two cai (材 , a unit of measurement in ancient Chinese architecture) and two qi (栔 , a unit of measurement in ancient Chinese architecture). The characteristics of the bracket sets are that a vessel-shaped plate（皿板） is set under the

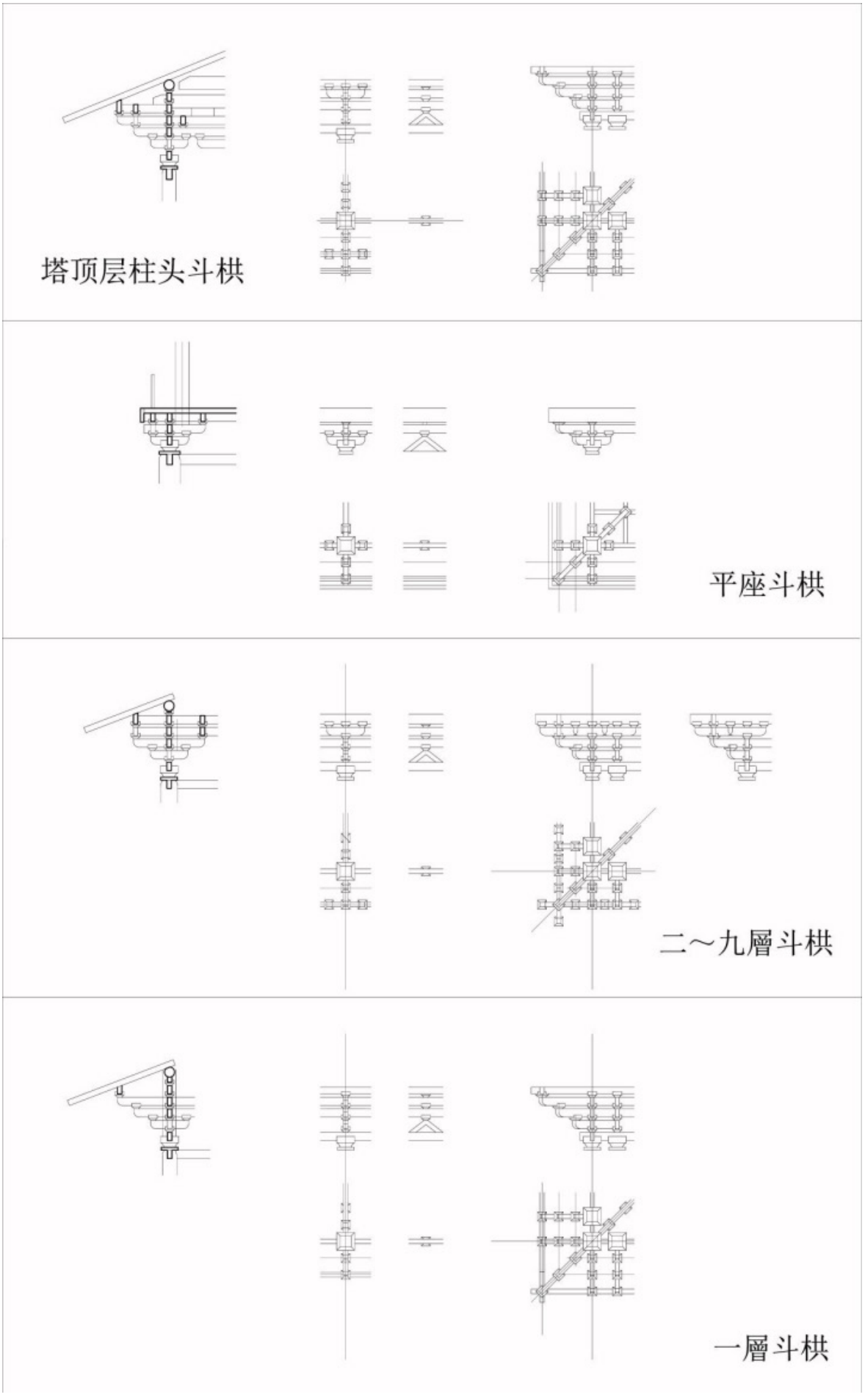


Figure - 18 The speculation of the dougong（） of each floor of Yongning Temple Pagoda (self - drawn)

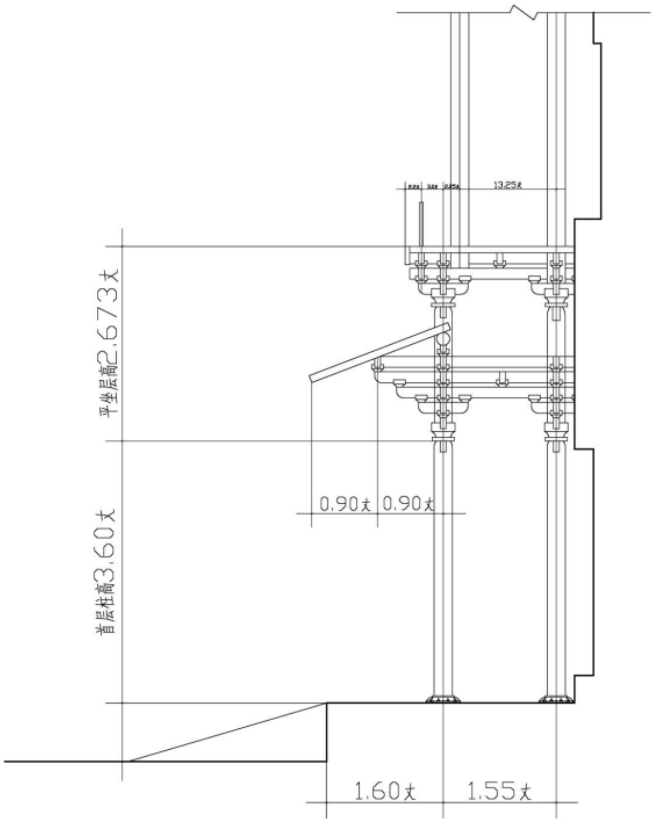


Figure - 19 The details of the first floor and the balcony of Yongning Temple Pagoda (self - drawn)

ludou (栌斗), and the method of the 16th cave of Tianlongshan （ 天 龙 山 ） Grottoes in the Northern Qi Dynasty is adopted at the column head of the eave column. No huagong (华栱) is extended from the mouth of the ludou, and it is replaced by a column head square. However, for the stability of the column body, a single lintel（单阑额） is added between the column heads of the eave columns and between the column heads of the mezzanine columns. (Figure - 18)

The result obtained in this way is that the height difference between the top of the column at the lower eave and the ground of the mezzanine above it is 2.673 zhang (equivalent to 7.291 meters in modern feet). This is a dimension obtained through drawing. (Figure - 19)

Thus, the elevation of the upper surface of the column head skin accumulated to the ninth layer is 45.68 zhang. The height of the bracket set above this place is 1.21 zhang. Therefore, the elevation of the upper surface of the purlin eave beam（橑檐方） at the top layer is 46.89 zhang. The distance from the elevation of 49 zhang under the bronze plate mentioned by Li Daoyuan is 2.11 zhang. Since the total length of the three - jump dougong（ 斗 栱 ） projection is 9 chi, and the total width of the elevation of the top layer is 7.2 chi, the distance between the front and rear purlin eave beams of the top layer of the tower is 9.0 zhang. If the rise is calculated as 1/4 of the distance between the front and rear purlin eave beams, the rise should be 2.25 zhang. It is very close in value to the 2.11 zhang just deduced by the author.

In fact, the roof pitch of wooden structures before the Tang Dynasty was relatively gentle. Taking the distance between the front and rear liao yan fang（ 橑 檐 方 ） as 9.0 zhang, the remaining 2.11 zhang after accumulation was the lifting height. The lifting height of the top of the tower was approximately 1/4.25 of the distance between the front and rear liao yan fang. From the perspective of architectural history, this lifting ratio was still slightly steeper than the known lifting ratio of the roofs of Tang Dynasty wooden palaces. In other words, if the top of the tower was constructed with a lifting height of 1/4, it did not seem to be very consistent with the historical logic of the development of ancient wooden structures known to the author. Instead, the remaining 2.11 zhang of the accumulated lifting height of the top of the tower was a more appropriate choice that conformed to the structural logic of this era.

(3) Analysis and speculation on the overall proportion of the tower body

Based on the above analysis, the author obtained two extended modules related to the height of the Yongning Temple Pagoda. One is the “7 - zhang” module based on the number “seven”, with the height of the first - floor columns being 3.5 zhang. The other is the “7.2 - zhang” module based on the number “nine”, with the height of the first - floor columns being 3.6 zhang. Unfortunately, the sum of the heights of the dougong (bracket sets) above the column heads and the mezzanine floor calculated by the author from the drawing is only 2.673 zhang, and it is impossible to establish a proportional relationship where the ground elevation of the second floor is exactly twice the height of the first - floor columns. Therefore, here I only borrows this height ratio that appears in the wooden - structured pavilions of the Tang and Song dynasties, assuming that twice the height of the first - floor columns is used as the extended module of the tower body scale in the concept, and applies it to the overall proportion analysis of the tower body.

Taking “7 zhang” as the expansion modulus, the sum of 7 “7 zhangs” is 49 zhang, which can reach directly to the highest point of the tower top structure. Adding another 7 zhang on it forms the brake base and the Tasha（塔刹）, the top of the tower spire, so the total height of the tower is 56 zhang.

Taking “7.2 zhang” as the extended modulus, with 7 times 7.2 zhang, the height has reached 50.4 zhang, and this height value has exceeded the elevation dimension described by Li Daoyuan below the Golden Dew Plate. If another 7.2 zhang is added on top, the total height of the tower would be 57.6 zhang. This height value seems to be slightly higher than the styling proportion that a tower should have.

An interesting value is 4.9 zhang. In fact, this is a value that can be almost simultaneously associated with the numbers

"nine" and "seven". Because 4.9 is exactly 0.7 times of 7, and 4.9 zhang is exactly one-tenth of the height of 49 zhang below the spire as described by Li Daoyuan. In other words, when analyzing the tower body with this value, the structural vertex of the tower, that is, the height of 49 zhang below the spire, can be exactly divided into ten parts of 4.9 zhang each.

What is more interesting is that in the large-scale proportion control, the upper elevation of the eighth 4.9 - zhang section is 39.2 zhang. This height exactly coincides with the ground elevation of the eighth floor of the tower, with 7.2 zhang as the expansion module. The ground elevation of the eighth floor of the tower can be calculated from the following values:

3.6 + 3.375 + 3.15 + 2.925 + 2.7 + 2.475 + 2.25 + (2.673×7) = 39.186 zhang.

This is a dimension that is very close to the height of 39.2 zhang, which is the accumulation of 8 heights of 4.9 zhang. Above the ground of the eighth floor, add the column heights of the eighth and ninth floors, the height of the Dougong（铺作） between the two floors, the height of the Dougong at the top of the columns on the top floor, and the height of the tower top structure:

2.025 + 2.673 + 1.8 + 1.21 + 2.11 = 9.818 zhang.

39.186 + 9.818 = 49.004 zhang.

That is to say, if we analyze based on the value of 4.9 zhang, the ground elevation of the eighth floor is approximately the height of 8 times 4.9 zhang. From above the eighth floor of the tower structure to the vertex of the tower top structure, that is, within the 49-zhang height below the finial, the remaining height difference is exactly the height of 2 times 4.9 zhang.

The ground elevation of the eighth floor of the tower body is based on the modulus of 7.2 zhang, which is expanded based on the number 9. That is, the height of the columns on the first floor is set at 3.6 zhang, and the height of the columns on each floor is regularly decreased based on this. The result is formed when the height accumulates to the ground of the eighth floor. If the cumulative height of 10 segments of 4.9 zhang, that is, the height below the pagoda finial is 49 zhang, and the height of the pagoda finial base and the pagoda finial above is also set at 7.2 zhang, then the total height of the whole tower is: 49 + 7.2 = 56.2 zhang. This is a value relatively close to the total height of the tower (56 zhang) previously speculated by the author based on the expansion modulus of 7 zhang.

In the actual proportion analysis, the value of 9.8 zhang, which is twice the value of 4.9, can also be used as a reference value. That is, the height from the top of the pagoda (excluding the finial) to the base of the pagoda is 5 times 9.8 zhang; the elevation of the ground on the eighth floor of the

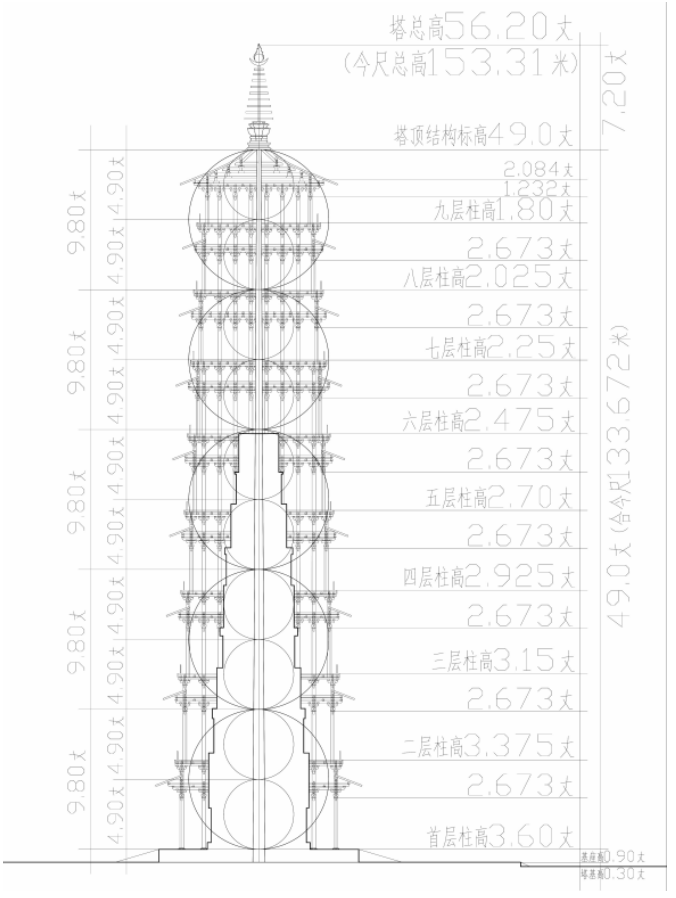


Figure - 20 The sectional dimensions of each floor of Yongning Temple Pagoda based on the number «9» (self - drawn - 2021)

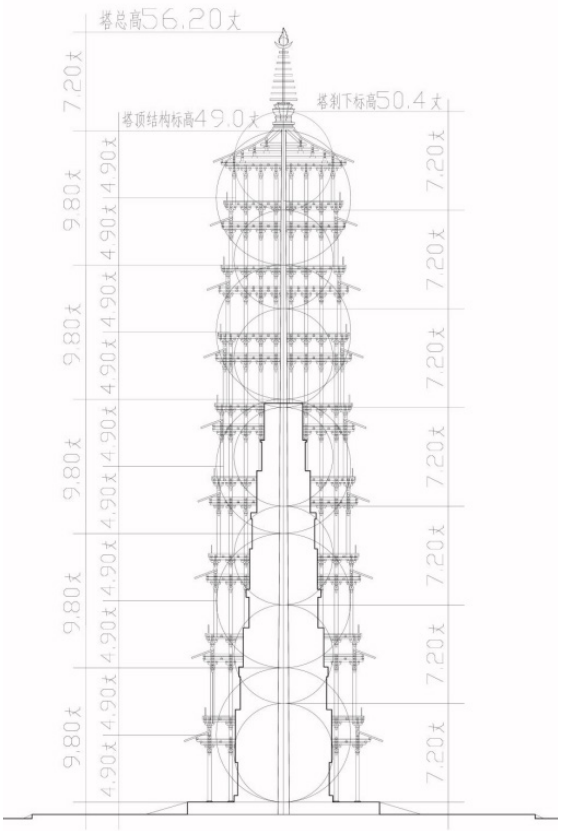


Figure - 21 The sectional proportion analysis of Yongning Temple Pagoda based on the number «9» (self - drawn - 2021)

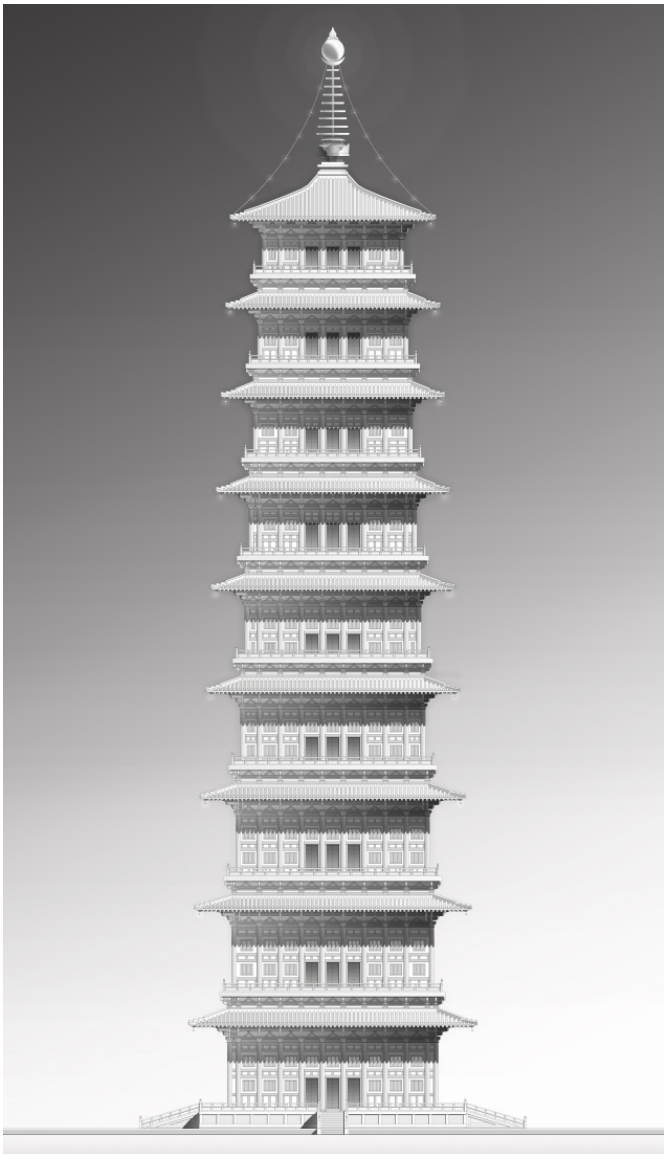


Figure - 21 The sectional proportion analysis of Yongning Temple Pagoda based on the number «9» (self - drawn - 2021)



Figure - 23 The colored elevation of Yongning Temple Pagoda based on the number «9» (rendered by Xing Zongman)

pagoda body is 4 times 9.8 zhang. Such an analysis seems to be simpler and clearer in terms of large-scale proportion control, and its essence is consistent with the proportion analysis based on 4.9 zhang.

According to this way of thinking, the two values of 7.2 zhang and 4.9 zhang can be regarded as important parameters for understanding the height module of this wooden tower. We can be interpreted as the controlling heights of the tower body and the tower top. It is precisely in the combination and interaction between 4.9 zhang (9.8 zhang) with the number 7 as the reference system and 3.6 zhang (7.2 zhang) with the number 9 as the reference system that a certain appropriate proportional coordination is achieved. (Figure - 20, Figure - 21, Figure - 22, Figure - 23, Figure - 24)

Of course, such an analysis is somewhat subjective. This is just an analysis from the author's perspective and does not have any affirmative or negative implications. From this somewhat hypothetical analysis, if it happens to uncover the possible thinking mode that the ancients might have adopted when designing high - rise timber - framed buildings, it can also be regarded as an interesting discovery.

Translated at February 12, 2025

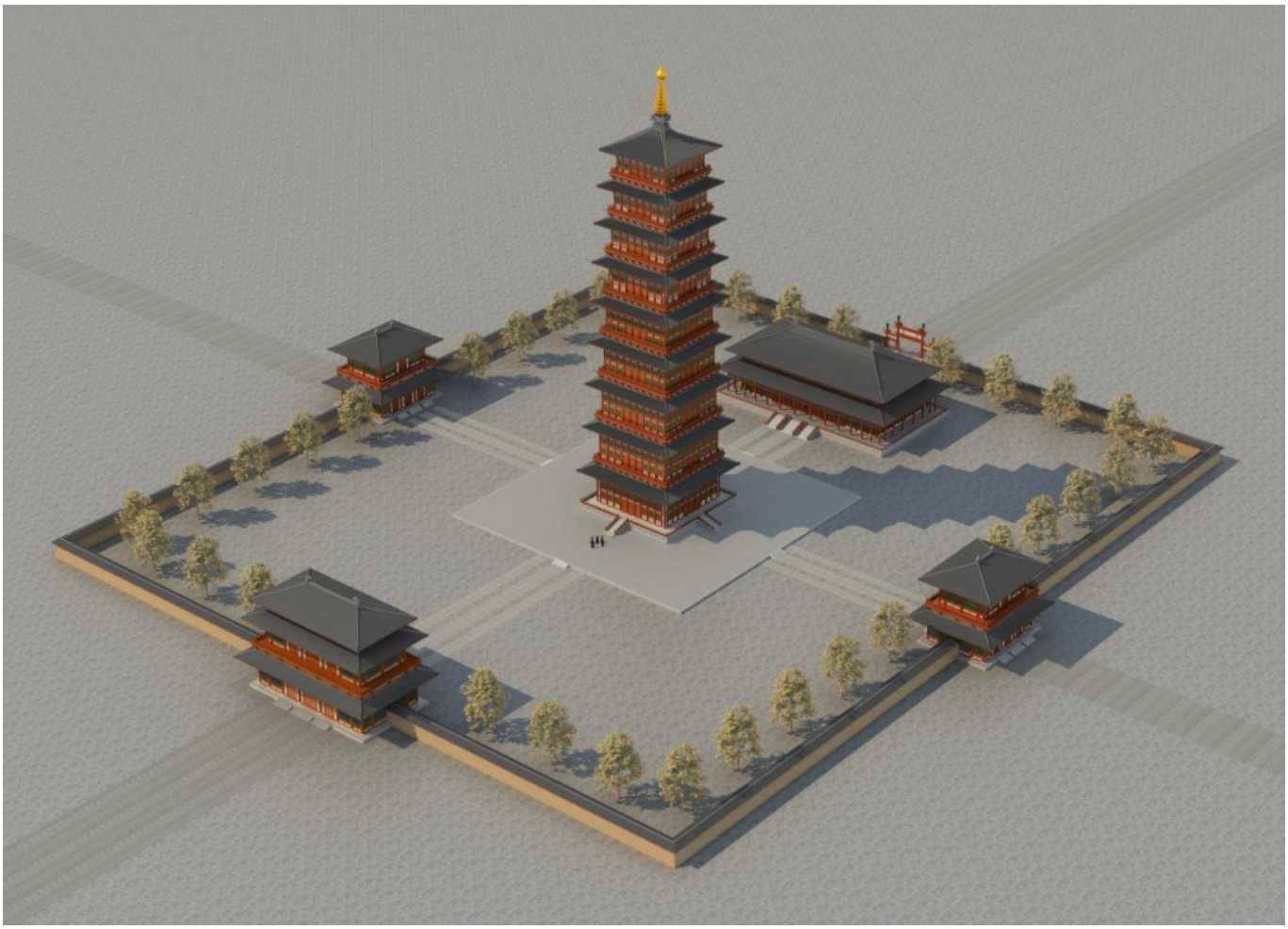


Figure - 24 The bird's - eye view of Yongning Temple and its pagoda in Luoyang during the Northern Wei Dynasty (drawn by Xing Zongman)



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