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*DREAM GARDEN*

70 × 150CM

Water-based Marker

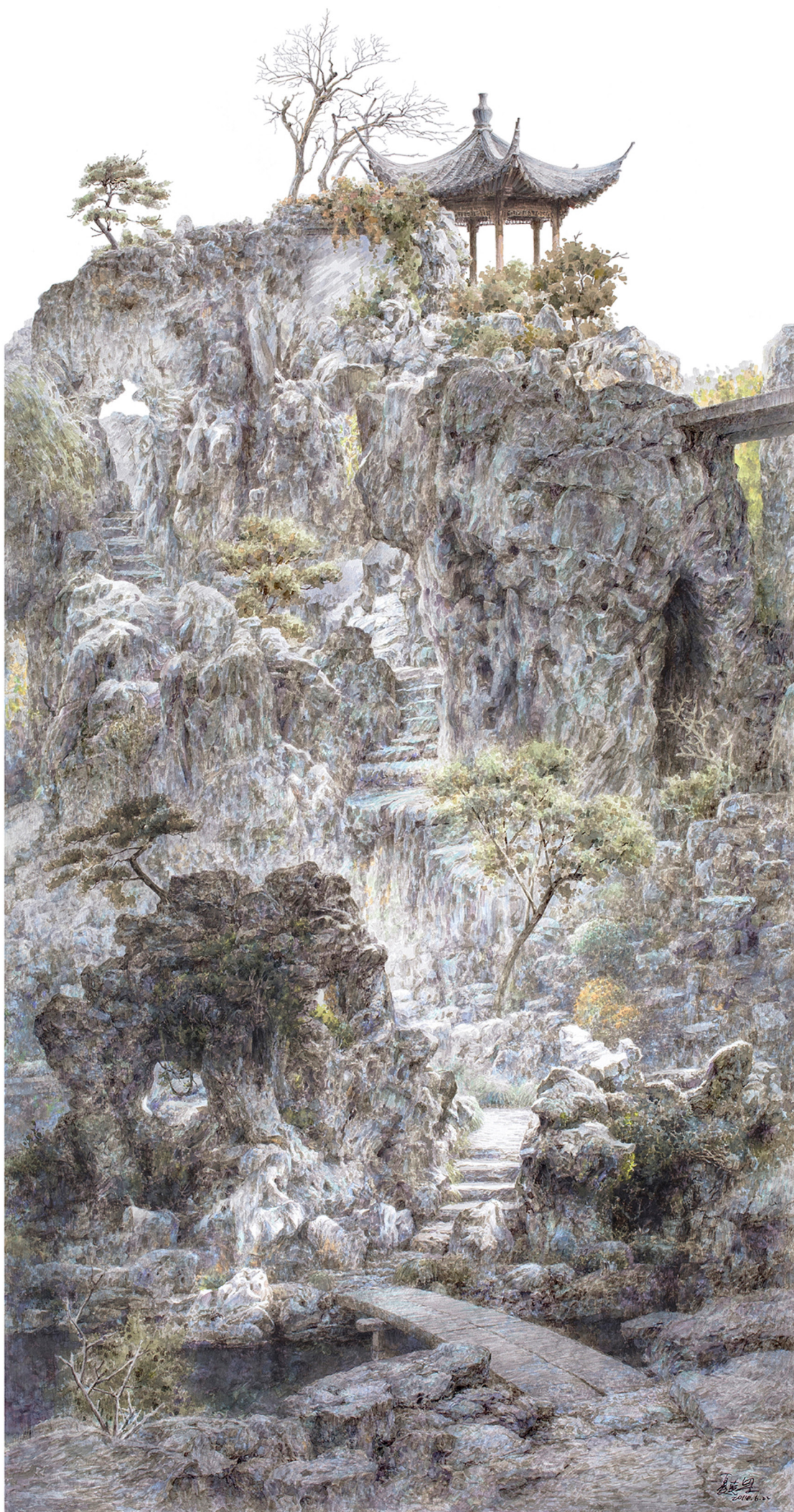
by Keliang Xia

*SNOW BY THE WATERSIDE (DETAIL)*

ORIGINAL WORK: 60 × 100 CM, 2026

Oil on canvas

by Qinglong Lu





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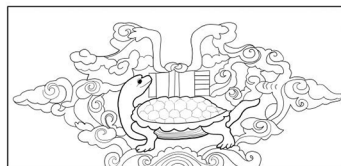


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# Research Articles





# 1983 - 2019: The Continuity of Art Censorship in Pakistan — The Women's Dissident Network, Two Documents, and Two Generations of Censorship Forms from a Stratigraphic Perspective

Author: Xiao Huang

**Abstract:** Existing scholarship on Pakistani art politics conventionally frames 1988 (the end of Zia-ul-Haq's military rule) as a definitive rupture, framing art censorship as a closed chapter confined to the Zia era and post-1988 period as one of democratic transition and global artistic recognition. This linear narrative renders the 2019 Karachi Biennale (KB19) censorship incident—where artist Adeela Suleman's *Killing Fields of Karachi* was sealed and destroyed by law enforcement and disavowed by the biennale organizing committee—a “missing event” unaccounted for in academic discourse. Adopting Foucauldian eventualization, stratigraphic metaphor, and the framework of intergenerational dissident networks, this study retrieves the KB19 incident from news archives and situates it within a continuous historical stratum stretching from 1983 to the present. It argues that the 2019 censorship is not a residual echo of 1980s repression but a structural recurrence of Pakistan's women's dissident network, which originated with the 1983 *Women Artists Manifesto* and was reactivated across generations in the 2019 solidarity open letter. By comparing the two texts, this research reveals evolving modalities of censorship—from named state repression under martial law to anonymized neoliberal censorship and institutional self-censorship—alongside the persistent structural grammar of artistic dissent, including professional identity-based resistance, metaphorical political expression, intergenerational institutional transmission, and strategic deployment of silence.

**Keywords:** Pakistani contemporary art; art censorship; Karachi Biennale 2019; women artists' dissident network; stratigraphic analysis; intergenerational transmission

## 1. Introduction: The Missing Event in a Rupture Narrative

In existing studies of Pakistani art politics, 1988 serves as a rigid temporal boundary: the death of Zia-ul-Haq in a plane crash ended martial law, restored democratic politics, and supposedly consigned art censorship to history. Syed and Abdullah's (2015) four-phase periodization defines 1977–1988 as the “institutionalization of art censorship,” while post-1988 phases are framed as democratic transition and globalization with international recognition. In this narrative, censorship is treated as an exclusive feature of the Zia era, with no place in the post-dictatorial present.

On October 28, 2019, this boundary was stratigraphically exposed. The Karachi Biennale organizers declared Adeela

Suleman's *Killing Fields of Karachi* “incompatible with the ethos of KB19 whose theme is ‘Ecology and the Environment’” and refused to display it; media simultaneously reported the work was sealed by “law enforcement agencies.” No images, official archives, or judicial records remain. The event unfolded and vanished within five days—reported on October 28, met with solidarity statements on October 30, street protests on November 1—and then disappeared from public view.

This omission from academic literature is not accidental. It is the inevitable result of the rupture narrative: when censorship is essentialized as a Zia-era phenomenon, the 2019 incident loses the analytical grammar to be recognized as censorship. It fits neither democratic transition nor global recognition, becoming an unnameable missing event.

This study aims to recover the KB19 incident from news archives and re-embed it within the continuous historical strata from 1983 to the present. It argues the 2019 Karachi Biennale censorship is not a belated echo of 1980s authoritarian control, but a structural recurrence of Pakistan's women's dissident network in the 21st century. This network emerged with the 1983 *Women Artists Manifesto* and found intergenerational confirmation in the 2019 open letter supporting Suleman. Juxtaposing these two moments reveals the intergenerational transformation of censorship's forms and the enduring structural stability of dissident grammar.

## **2. Theoretical Tools: Eventualization, Stratigraphy, and Intergenerational Transmission**

### **2.1 From “News” to “Event”: Foucauldian Eventualization**

The first methodological task is to transform KB19 from fleeting news coverage into a rigorous object of academic analysis, using Foucault's method of eventualization developed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*.

Eventualization does not isolate or exaggerate an occurrence; it re-embeds an apparently isolated incident within the multiple conditional networks that made it possible. For KB19, this means rejecting superficial explanations such as an individual official's decision or routine censorship, and instead interrogating three interconnected questions: what knowledge classification system framed “extrajudicial killings” as irrelevant to “Ecology and Environment”; what power relations allowed law enforcement to enter the biennale space while the organizing committee disavowed the work; and what historical sediment connects the 1983 manifesto signatories and 2019 solidarity signatories as nodes within the same network.

### **2.2 The Stratigraphic Metaphor: Time is Not a River, but Rock Strata**

This study adopts stratigraphy as a core analytical metaphor to re-conceptualize historical temporality. Rather than understanding time as a uniform, flowing river, stratigraphy conceptualizes it as the superimposition of heterogeneous sedimentary layers, each with unique material composition, formation conditions, and fossil assemblages. Relationships between upper and lower strata are complex, including continuous deposition and unconformities marked by erosion or gaps.

Bringing this geological framework to historical analysis moves beyond the crude binary of continuity versus rupture between the 1980s and 2010s. Instead, it poses a precise question: are the 1983 *Women Artists Manifesto* and the 2019 soli-

idity open letter consecutive upper and lower strata within the same sedimentary basin, or separated by an unconformity caused by major structural shifts?

This study argues both documents belong to the same sedimentary basin—the Pakistani women's dissident network—as continuous upper and lower strata. Clear continuity exists in their fossil assemblages, including key figures, institutions, and discursive strategies, alongside significant lithological differences in censorship forms, media infrastructures, and state power intervention patterns.

### **2.3 Dissident Network: An Alternative Organizational Model**

This study proposes the concept of a dissident network to distinguish it from traditional categories of “movement” and “organization.” A movement relies on a unified ideological platform, fixed membership, and a linear narrative of emergence-apex-decline. An organization assumes formal institutional structure, hierarchical labor division, and auditable membership rosters. Neither adequately describes the historical form of women's artistic dissent in Pakistan.

A dissident network is defined by four interrelated traits: loose connections sustained by informal bonds such as personal relationships, master-disciple lineages, shared professional experience, and exhibition collaborations, rather than formal membership or political affiliation; intergenerational transmission of critical knowledge, resistant strategies, and moral legitimacy through oral instruction, demonstration, and collective practice, rather than institutionalized training; discursive recurrence, where successive generations independently develop analogous metaphorical tactics under similar structural censorship pressure, representing convergent evolution rather than direct imitation; and dormancy and activation, remaining low-visibility for long periods before rapid mobilization around triggering events, issuing collective declarations before returning to quiescence.

This model provides a foundational framework for interpreting the KB19 incident: the 2019 open letter supporting Suleman was not a spontaneous civic action, but the rapid activation of a long-dormant dissident network. The signatory list stands as the fleeting public instantiation of this network's underlying structure.

## **3. First Stratum: The 1983 Women Artists Manifesto and the Birth of the Dissident Network**

### **3.1 Stratigraphic Background: Zia-ul-Haq's Enforced Formalism**

In 1983, Pakistan was in the sixth year of Zia-ul-Haq's mar-

tial law. Syed and Abdullah (2015) characterize the period's artistic ecology as enforced formalism: the state did not outright ban art, but incentivized depoliticized genres such as landscape, portraiture, and calligraphy through state patronage, while systematically removing works with political dissent or content deemed "incompatible with Islamic values" from state exhibitions.

Kamran (2019, p. 715) highlights the regime's gendered censorship orientation: state politics centered on female sexual morality, with strict visual and performing arts censorship targeting works addressing women's oppression, religious extremism, and dictatorship. Sheikh (2017, p. 3) documents concrete cases: Jamil Naqsh's female nudes were removed for "social ethics" in the 1981 national exhibition; works by Salima Hashmi and Jamila Masood were rejected for political content; Colin David's nude paintings were consistently excluded. Censorship targeted both direct political critique and figurative representations of the female body.

Against this backdrop, fifteen women artists in Lahore signed an unpublished document in 1983, later known as the *Women Artists Manifesto*.

### 3.2 Close Reading of the Document: Content and Strategy of the Manifesto

Per Kamran (2019, p. 716; 2021, p. 136), the manifesto states:

"We, the women artists of Pakistan, having noted with concern the decline in the status and condition of life of Pakistani women, and having noted the effects of the anti-reason, anti-arts environment on the quality of life in our homeland. Having noted the significant contribution the pioneering women artists have made to the course of arts and art education in Pakistan. Believing as we do in the basic rights of all men, women and children to a life free from want and enriched by the joys of fruitful labor and cultural self-realization and our commitment, as practitioners and teachers of the arts, to the noblest ideals of a free, rational and civilized existence. This affirms the following principles to guide us in their struggle for the cultural development of the people to serve as the manifesto of the women artists of Pakistan."

Close reading reveals three strategic layers. First, the signatories identify as "women artists of Pakistan" rather than "feminist" or "dissident" artists—a tactical choice to claim universal civilized rights through professional identity, avoiding the local stigma of "feminist" as a Western, anti-Islam import (Kamran, 2021, p. 135). Second, it expresses concern over the declining status of Pakistani women, a silent reference to the 1983 Law of Evidence that reduced women's testimony to half that of men, and the violent suppression of women protesters. Third, it uses affirmative statements instead of direct accusations, a form of metaphorical politics that affirms shared values rather than condemning state actions, allowing circulation under censorship surveillance. Though never pub-

licized under martial law, the manifesto empowered women to speak more boldly against misogyny in their art (Kamran, 2019, p. 716).

### 3.3 Stratigraphic Figures: The List of Signatories and Institutional Lineage

The manifesto signatories form the foundational fossil assemblage of Pakistan's women's dissident network: Zubeida Javed, Abbasi Abidi, Salima Hashmi, Lala Rukh, Talat Ahmed, Shehrazade Alam, Rabia Zuberi, Jalees Nagi, Birjees Iqbal, Riffat Alvi, Nahid Raza, Mehr Afroz, Qudsia Nisar, Mamoon Bashir, Veeda Ahmed.

Kamran (2021, pp. 136–137) summarizes their artistic practices: Zubeida Javed's conceptual landscape painting; Abbasi Abidi's still life with quiet resolve; Salima Hashmi's metaphorical work centered on windows and withered branches; Lala Rukh's abstract lines and grids; Talat Ahmed's figurative sculpture amid prohibitions on human imagery; Shehrazade Alam's pottery as craft-based resistance; Nahid Raza's abstracted female bodies through torn veils; Mehr Afroz's small-scale gender-political paintings; and Riffat Alvi's homeland and soil imagery.

Institutional lineage is critical. Arshad (2023, pp. 6–7) notes Anna Molka Ahmad, sole permanent fine arts faculty at the University of the Punjab, shaped an entire generation of women painters including Abbasi Abidi. Hashmi Qutub and Man-



Figure 1 & 2. Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (IVS)



zoor (n.d., p. 9) add that Mehr Afroz and Nahid Raza—1983 manifesto signatories—were long-term faculty at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (IVS). Adeela Suleman graduated from IVS in 1999 (Wikipedia, Vasl Artists' Association), meaning she inherited dissident grammar: indirect political expression and sustained speech under censorship, not merely formal artistic training.

## 4. Second Stratum: The 2019 KB19 Incident and the Recurrence of the Network

### 4.1 Stratigraphic Background: The Myth of “Freedom” in the Post-9/11 Era

From 1988 to 2019, Pakistan underwent democratic transition, military coups, the War on Terror, and the social media revolution. A liberation narrative dominated the art world: Zia's dark age ended, censorship vanished, and Pakistani art achieved unprecedented global recognition. Syed and Abdullah (2015, p. 32) formalized this view, framing 2001–2011 as an era of global opportunity for socio-political art, boosted by post-9/11 international attention.

While Pakistani artists indeed entered major global institutions, this narrative is incomplete: it equates international acclaim with domestic freedom and market success with political security. The KB19 incident acts as a stratigraphic interruption, proving state violence never left the art field—it only changed its intervention mode, and censorship persisted under new legitimizing discourses.

### 4.2 Reconstruction of the Event: Timeline, Curator, and Actor Network

With no surviving artwork images, official archives, or judicial records, this reconstruction relies on *Dawn* coverage (October 28–November 1, 2019), Wikipedia entries for Adeela Suleman and the Karachi Biennale, and the Aicon Gallery's official biography.

#### 4.2.1 Chronology and Reconstruction of the KB19 Incident

The 2019 Karachi Biennale (KB19) theme was “Ecology & Environment,” curated by Mohammad Zeeshan. Suleman's *Killing Fields of Karachi* was an officially invited core work in Zeeshan's curatorial section, verified by the Aicon Gallery and Karachi Biennale Wikipedia entry. This is empirically significant: the work was not an unvetted marginal piece, but formally integrated into the biennale's thematic framework. Zeeshan's curatorial choice institutionally certified the relevance of “extrajudicial killings” to ecological discourse—a certification later unilaterally revoked by the organizing committee.

#### October 27, 2019 (Sunday)

The biennale opened at Frere Hall. *Killing Fields of Karachi* debuted as a core work, featuring 444 concrete pillars arranged in a cemetery formation, each topped with a metal withered flower. A accompanying video played testimony from Khan Muhammad, father of victim Naqeebullah Mehsud.

On the same day, Karachi Parks and Horticulture Authority Director Afaq Mirza forcibly disrupted a press conference by activist M. Jibran Nasir, tearing down a microphone and attempting physical violence—signaling state violence spilling from anonymous law enforcement to cultural bureaucrats.

#### October 28, 2019 (Monday) Morning

*Dawn* reported the organizing committee deemed the work “incompatible with the ethos of KB19 whose theme is ‘Ecology and the Environment’” (*Dawn.com*, 2019) and confirmed it was sealed by “law enforcement agencies.” No agency name, legal authority, or work location was provided. Fifteen to twenty unidentified individuals smashed and removed the 444 pillars; the video space was padlocked with unmarked yellow seals. The committee claimed politicizing the biennale would undermine efforts to bring art to the public and marginalized artists into the mainstream (Wikipedia).

The core paradox is clear: Zeeshan had formally integrated extrajudicial killings into the ecological framework, yet the committee's disavowal revoked the legitimacy of its own curatorial system. This was not a thematic mismatch, but a clash between curatorial authority and administrative power, a paradigmatic case of artistic autonomy suppressed by institutional self-censorship.

#### October 30, 2019 (Wednesday)

*Images* (Dawn group) reported an open letter supporting Suleman, signed by Sheema Kermani, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Marvi Mazhar, and others (*Images Staff*, 2019). Civil society held a “die-in” at Frere Hall, with protesters lying amid broken pillars to memorialize extrajudicial killing victims. Students and citizens attempted to reconstruct the installation. As Suleman stated: “This is not a protest, this is a memorial—we will not forget you.”

#### November 1, 2019 (Friday)

*Dawn* covered a protest at the Karachi Press Club, with signs reading “Art is not a crime” and “Freedom of speech.” No police intervention or arrests were reported (Salman, 2019).

#### 4.2.2 Artistic Analysis of *Killing Fields of Karachi*

As a site-specific installation, *Killing Fields of Karachi* employs a highly restrained, minimalist visual language to transform public space into a site of collective mourning and political testimony. Structured around 444 concrete pillars ar-

ranged in a grid-like cemetery formation, the work uses repetitive, monotonous forms to visualize the scale of extrajudicial killings; each pillar stands as an anonymous monument to an individual life erased by state violence. The withered metal flowers atop the pillars carry layered symbolic meaning: they reference rituals of commemoration while signaling the abandonment, neglect, and collective amnesia that surround victims of extrajudicial violence in Karachi.

The accompanying video installation further intensifies the work's emotional and political charge. Focused on Khan Muhammad, father of the victim Naqeebullah Mehsud, the video uses quiet, static framing and intimate testimony to turn abstract statistics into human suffering. The juxtaposition of the cold, industrial concrete pillars and the raw, personal grief of the video creates a powerful aesthetic tension: the architectural rigor of the installation embodies the impersonal machinery of state violence, while the video restores individual humanity to the numbered victims.



Figure 3. Adeela Suleman's outdoor installation, *The Killing Fields of Karachi*, 2019

Website Source: <https://hyperallergic.com/adeela-suleman/>



Figure 4. A group gathers to watch the documentary portion of *The Killing Fields of Karachi* at 2019 Karachi Biennale

Website Source: <https://hyperallergic.com/adeela-suleman/>

Situated in Frere Hall — a prominent colonial public space at the heart of Karachi — the work intervenes symbolically and geographically. It brings the violence of the “periphery” into the civic “center,” forcing elite and mainstream audiences to confront deaths that are routinely excluded from official history and public discourse. In formal terms, *Killing Fields of Karachi* operates as both memorial and critique: it avoids sensationalism, rejects rhetorical excess, and uses the quiet persistence of visual repetition to demand remembrance — making its forced erasure by law enforcement and the biennale organizing committee all the more politically symptomatic.

#### 4.2.3 Key Characteristics of the Event Stratum

The KB19 incident displays four distinct stratigraphic traits that distinguish it within Pakistan's art censorship history.

First is the dual reversal of curatorial legitimacy. Zeeshan's authoritative thematic interpretation was unilaterally overturned by the organizing committee, creating a vertical institutional power fracture where administrative fiat overrode curatorial expertise, making curation itself a site of censorship.

Second is the anonymization and spillover of state violence. Destroying agencies operated without identification, justification, or legal warrant, while a cultural administrator used direct physical coercion. Violence shifted between anonymous institutional force and individual aggression, creating a double bind that blocked clear responsibility attribution.

Third is the embodied intensification of dissident grammar. The “die-in” elevated 1980s metaphorical politics to corporeal expression: where 1983 signatories used torn veils to symbolize confinement, 2019 protesters used their bodies as surrogate monuments for the destroyed work. When art is erased, the body becomes the final medium of resistance.

Fourth is the stratigraphic re-emergence of the dissident network. Solidarity from Kerani, Obaid-Chinoy, Mazhar, and others marked the 1983 network's activation in 2019, representing synchronic mobilization across generational nodes rather than replacement.

In sum, the incident is defined by anonymized unaccountable state violence, internal institutional curatorial division, embodied memorial protest, and intergenerational dissident network recurrence.

The 444 pillars were destroyed and removed, their whereabouts unknown. Zeeshan has not issued a full public statement; the committee has not retracted its judgment, launched accountability measures, or revised protocols. No officials were held responsible, no policies changed, and no artwork was recovered. This is not the chapter's conclusion—it is its starting point.

#### 4.3 Discourse Analysis: The Knowledge Politics of the Biennale Statement

The statement issued by the Biennale organizing committee is the core discursive symptom of the KB19 incident. Its key formulation deserves repeated close reading:

“With regards to the exhibition in question, we feel that despite the artist’s perspective, it is not compatible with the ethos of KB19 whose theme is ‘Ecology and the Environment’.”

(Dawn.com, 2019)

This statement accomplishes three discursive operations:

**First, acknowledging value while simultaneously disqualifying it.** “Despite the artist’s perspective has its value”—this is an acknowledgment of the legitimacy of Suleman’s art; “it is not compatible with the theme’s ethos”—this is the immediate revocation of that same legitimacy. This is a form of exclusion that does not constitute defamation.

**Second, opposing “the political” to “the ecological.”** The statement assumes that “Ecology and the Environment” are a non-political, universal, natural category beyond conflicts of interest, while “extrajudicial killings” are a particular, partisan, political category that should not enter cultural discourse. This is the violence of knowledge classification systems: certain life issues can be named as “environment,” others are named as “politics.” Karachi’s air and water are ecology; the corpses on Karachi’s streets are not.

**Third, constructing “the margin” as a pre-political position.** Wikipedia reports that the organizing committee believed its effort was to bring artists “from the fringe to the mainstream cultural discourse.” This formulation presupposes: the margin is a pre-political, silent position, waiting to be “brought into” the mainstream to gain visibility. It completely ignores: Suleman’s work does not “speak from the margin,” but rather forces the margin—the victims of extrajudicial killings, the 444 lives deprived of names and faces by state violence—into mainstream view. The Biennale’s “bringing in” precisely sought to erase this act of forceful insertion.

#### 4.4 Stratigraphic Figures: The Network Manifestation of the Open Letter

The 2019 open letter is the stratigraphic counterpart to the 1983 manifesto, marking intergenerational network reactivation. Public supporters include Sheema Kermani, a dancer and longstanding Women’s Action Forum (WAF) member advancing women’s rights through performance; Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker focusing on gender-based violence; and Marvi Mazhar, social activist for marginalized communities.

Rigorous evidentiary reconstruction confirms tangible intergenerational links. Kermani collaborated continuously with 1983 signatories Lala Rukh and Salima Hashmi as core WAF members (Kamran, 2019; 2021; Hashmi Qutub & Manzoor,

n.d.). Obaid-Chinoy shares a long mentor-collaborator relationship with Hashmi, established public knowledge in Pakistan’s art community. 1983 signatories Nahid Raza and Mehr Afroz taught at IVS, Suleman’s 1999 alma mater, verified by Wikipedia and the Vasl Artists’ Association website.

A methodological caveat applies: this juxtaposition raises interpretive questions rather than proving definitive causal links. Direct academic documentation of master–disciple ties and formal collaborations remains limited. The dissident network model justifies this comparison: intergenerational recurrence does not require constant direct interaction, but is sustained by shared institutional spaces (IVS), metaphorical political discourse, and opposition to state censorship and violence.

### 5. Intergenerational Comparison: Two Documents, Two Generations of Networks, One Structure

#### 5.1 Stratigraphic Comparison

| Dimension                   | 1983 Manifesto                                                                              | 2019 Open Letter                                                                            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Triggering Event            | Promulgation of the Law of Evidence, reducing women’s legal testimony to half               | Destruction of Suleman’s work <i>Killing Fields of Karachi</i>                              |
| Form of Publication         | Unpublished internal document, circulated within women artists’ networks                    | Public open letter, disseminated via social media and news media reports                    |
| Composition of Signatories  | 15 women artists, all practitioners and educators                                           | trans-sector coalition of artists, filmmakers, dancers, social activists                    |
| Core Strategy               | Affirmative statements, no direct accusations, speaking through professional identity       | Direct appeal holding the Biennale accountable, endorsement through public figure influence |
| Relationship with the State | Explicit opposition to martial law, censors had names and faces                             | State violence anonymized, no official names, no institutional statements                   |
| Institutional Foundation    | No formal organization, platform provided by Women’s Action Forum (WAF)                     | No formal organization, social media as platform for publication and dissemination          |
| Subsequent Impact           | Became foundational archive of women’s art dissent, repeatedly cited in academic literature | No lasting institutional change, rapidly faded from public view after the event             |

#### 5.2 Diagnosis of Differences: The Intergenerational Evolution of Censorship’s Forms

A comparative examination of the two moments reveals four critical shifts in the morphology of censorship and resistance, marking a clear intergenerational evolution in the operation of power and the articulation of dissent.

First, censorship has undergone a profound anonymization of the censor. In 1983, the Zia-ul-Haq regime functioned as a clearly identifiable, personalized locus of censorship: its authority was publicly visible, its policies nameable, and its



repression open to contestation and historical documentation. By 2019, this personalized figure had vanished, replaced by a diffuse apparatus that operated without official attribution, institutional declaration, or legal authorization. The artwork simply vanished, a paradigmatic expression of neoliberal censorship: power operates through dispersed, depersonalized, and proceduralized mechanisms, rendering violence untraceable and responsibility structurally unassignable.

Second, the art institution itself has shifted from target to collaborator, representing the internalization of censorship. In 1983, a clear boundary separated the repressive state from the censored art field. In 2019, the Karachi Biennale organizing committee did not merely comply with external pressure; it actively legitimized censorship through the claim that the work was “incompatible with the theme”—a judgment produced not by state agencies but by the art institution itself. This self-disciplinary logic pre-emptively anticipates the limits of state tolerance, meaning censorship is no longer imposed from without but enacted from within.

Third, the media of dissent has been fundamentally transformed, with lasting implications for cultural memory. The 1983 manifesto existed as a physical document, circulated and preserved clandestinely, granting it durable archival weight that continues to be cited by scholars four decades later. The 2019 open letter, by contrast, circulated as a digital text across social media, achieving rapid dissemination at the cost of ephemerality. It disappeared from public visibility within days of the crisis and remains absent from sustained academic analysis, revealing a trade-off between communicative speed and archival persistence.

Fourth, the composition of resistance has expanded through professional spillover of the dissident network. The 1983 manifesto was signed exclusively by women artists, bound by a shared disciplinary and creative identity. The 2019 open letter mobilized a far broader coalition, encompassing artists, filmmakers, dancers, and social activists. This cross-sectoral alliance demonstrates that the grammar, strategies, and moral legitimacy of women’s art dissent had been adopted by women cultural producers across fields, consolidating a more expansive interprofessional solidarity.

### 5.3 Evidence of Continuity: The Intergenerational

## Transmission of Dissident Grammar

Despite censorship’s formal evolution, the dissident network’s core grammar retains striking structural stability across generations.

First, professional identity takes priority over explicit political labeling, grounding resistance in artistic dignity rather than partisan affiliation. Second, metaphorical political expression persists and evolves: 1983’s veils and withered forms developed into Suleman’s direct yet symbolically layered memorial, upgrading rather than abandoning metaphorical politics. Third, institutional lineage transmission continues via IVS, WAF, and Vasl Artists’ Association, passing dissident grammar across generations. Fourth, strategic silence operates as resistance: the 1983 manifesto’s unpublished status and 2019’s destroyed artwork both refuse state-defined speech conditions, turning absence into political statement. Fifth, courageous naming evolves: 1983’s silent institutional references matured into 2019’s direct naming of Rao Anwar, accused of 444 extrajudicial killings, turning the artwork itself into archaeological testimony.

## 6. Conclusion

The KB19 incident dismantles the myth of post-Zia artistic freedom in Pakistan, proving censorship has not vanished but transformed into anonymized, institutionally internalized forms under neoliberal conditions. The intergenerational continuity between the 1983 Women Artists Manifesto and the 2019 solidarity open letter confirms the resilience of Pakistan’s women’s dissident network, which operates through loose informal ties, institutional lineage, and recursive discursive strategies rather than formal organizational structures. While media shifts and power mechanisms have altered the visibility and persistence of dissident actions, the core grammar of resistance—rooted in artistic professionalism, indirect political articulation, and refusal to be silenced by state-imposed constraints—remains stable. This study underscores that Pakistani art’s global acclaim coexists with unbroken domestic regulatory pressure, and the study of its political ecology must abandon rupture narratives to center the continuous, layered history of censorship and dissent.

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# Ornamental Patterns of Feng Shui Themes in Traditional Chinese Dwellings

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In the architectural tradition of Chinese folk dwellings, decorative patterns are not merely ornamental; they are a carrier of survival wisdom. They function as a bridge between the physical environment and the human psyche. Guided by a holistic view of the universe, ancient builders approached settlement design with an all-encompassing idealism. When confronted with spatial flaws—be it an improper orientation or a jagged mountain view—they did not resign themselves to fate. Instead, they activated a creative remedial mechanism. By arranging specific patterns in designated spaces, they utilized visual correction to achieve psychological balance.

This tradition, deeply rooted in Feng Shui (the art of placement), represents a profound pursuit of security. It evolved into a codified system where decorative patterns were used to “cure” architectural defects, ensuring the prosperity of the family and the clan.

## The Philosophy of Correction

The logic behind this system is precise. It views Heaven as the father and Earth as the mother, with deities acting as the spiritual anchors. Decorative patterns serve as the active agents to ward off evil and invite auspiciousness.

This practice was never random; it was a targeted response to environmental defects:

**Geometric Flaws:** Missing corners in a floor plan, which were believed to cause a loss of wealth, were symbolically “filled” by protective totems.

**Sensory Discomfort:** Dark, gloomy spaces were treated with bright, fire-element imagery to simulate sunlight and warmth.

**Spiritual Clashes:** Positions affected by “Sha Qi” (killing breath or negative energy), such as a long straight path pointing at the door, were neutralized with auspicious symbols.

### Beyond Superstition: An Ecological Perspective

It is crucial to understand that these “mysterious” patterns often embody ancient scientific principles. This system inter-

twines with early knowledge of geomagnetism, geology, and architecture. It addresses practical issues such as airflow direction (wind) and light distribution (sun), while also tapping into the psychology of safety.

The so-called practice of warding off evil spirits was, in effect, a method of environmental optimization. By manipulating symbols, the builders regulated the inhabitants’ visual and spatial experience, elevating a simple shelter into a sanctuary that unified art, belief, and science.

## The Application of the Five Elements

The ancient Chinese ideal was a dwelling that gathered “Sheng Qi” (vital energy)—nestled among mountains, commanding a view, and bathed in light. For homes that lacked this perfection, remedies were required.

Builders used the theory of the Five Elements to resolve unfavorable conditions. For example:

**Hostile Terrain:** If a house faced a sharp cliff or a harsh mountain ridge, specific patterns were used to “soften” the visual aggression.

**Road Formations:** Triangular road junctions or T-intersections facing the gate were considered dangerous. Remedial patterns were applied to the gate or roof to deflect this energy.

## Guardians and Talismans

To block malevolent influences, specific architectural elements were employed:

**Animal Totems:** Dragons, tigers, lions, and oxen were carved onto corridors and walls to act as spiritual guardians.

**The Bagua and Tai Chi:** The Eight Trigrams and the Tai Chi symbol were carved onto beam frameworks or door panels to harmonize the flow of energy.

**The Taishan Stone Patron:** A unique custom involving a stone tablet (often inscribed with “Taishan Stone Patron”) placed at a vulnerable spot to suppress evil spirits and ensure peace.



Through these methods, traditional Chinese dwellings achieved a sublimation, transforming from mere physical structures into integrated ecosystems that protected and nurtured life.

## 1. The True Forms of the Five Great Mountains: Remedial Decorative Patterns

The remedial decorative patterns known as the “True Forms of the Five Great Mountains” are essentially Taoist talismanic symbols used to correct spatial flaws and ward off misfortune. During the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420 AD), the Patriarch Ge Hong provided a vivid description of their power in his seminal work, *Baopuzi: The Master Who Embraces Simplicity* (specifically in the “Far-Flung Views” chapter).

Ge Hong described the “True Forms of the Five Great Mountains” map as the ultimate talisman. He claimed it could avert military disasters, 凶灾 (calamities), and rebellion. Furthermore, it acted as a karmic shield: anyone who harbored evil intentions against the bearer of the map would inevitably suffer the consequences of their own malice.

Moreover, for Taoist priests seeking immortality and longevity, carrying this text (or map) into the mountains was essential. It served to repel tigers, wolves, and mountain spirits. Even venomous creatures like scorpions and snakes, along with various malevolent entities, would not dare to approach the person carrying it.

This tradition continued into the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD). The *Kaiyuan Daozang* (Taoist Canon of the Kaiyuan Era), compiled by the Chongxuan Institute, stated that enshrining the “True Forms of the Five Great Mountains” in a home would prevent disasters and misfortune from arising, while ensuring that auspicious blessings would gather continuously. Keeping this map at home was akin to inviting benevolent deities to guard the household; all evil spirits, calamities, and illnesses would vanish on their own.

Hence, the popular folk saying emerged: “A home with the True Forms of the Five Great Mountains avoids harm, dispels disaster, and blocks all poisons.”

The *Kaiyuan Daozang* also personified the five great mountains revered by the ancients, describing them as having distinct human-like postures and symbolic meanings:

- Mount Tai (East): Described as “sitting.” It is like a mighty, unyielding giant seated in dignity. It represents solemnity and grace, symbolizing the idiom “as stable as Mount Tai”—focusing on the concept of stability.
- Mount Hua (West): Described as “standing.” It resembles a person standing upright (with a momentum ready to soar). It represents the philosophy of “no destruction, no creation,”

symbolizing inspiration, strength, and the drive to soar into the sky.

- Mount Heng (South): Described as “flying.” Uniquely, its posture resembles a bird spreading its wings. It represents lofty aspirations and ambition, symbolizing the idea of “startling the world with a single cry.”

- Mount Heng (North): Described as “lying down.” It is like a person resting (gathering strength for action). It represents galloping a thousand miles, symbolizing the courage to climb and strive.

- Mount Song (Central): As the center, it is described as “reclining” or “centered.” It symbolizes being steeped in classics, representing a profound cultural heritage.

In practical application, these patterns served as a “psychological placebo” for the ancients. The decorative motifs of the “True Forms of the Five Great Mountains” were typically placed at the entrances of villages or private residences. They were used to mitigate unfavorable factors encountered during life’s journeys—such as crossing rivers, entering valleys, walking in the wild at night, or staying in ominous rooms—thereby providing spiritual comfort and a sense of security.

The ancients did this mainly to dispel all kinds of unknown fears — such as those arising from crossing rivers and seas, venturing into remote mountains and valleys, traveling outdoors at night, or encountering demons and ghosts (the spirits of mountains, woods, rocks and waters) when occasionally staying in ominous haunted houses.

Ultimately, this was not only a ritual to ward off evil spirits, but also a way to seek spiritual comfort and a sense of security amid the uncertainties of ancient life.

The most common arrangement of stele inscriptions and physical artifacts of the True Form Charts of the Five Great Mountains (viewed from the observer’s perspective facing the layout) is as follows:

- Upper right: Mount Tai, the Eastern Yue
- Upper left: Mount Heng, the Northern Yue
- Lower right: Mount Heng, the Southern Yue
- Lower left: Mount Hua, the Western Yue
- Center: Mount Song, the Central Yue

This layout of four corners plus a central position is the most prevalent on steles, bronze mirrors, hanging talisman plaques and other artifacts of the Five Great Mountains across successive dynasties.

In addition, a small number of ancient book editions feature slight variations in the labeling order of the mountain names. For instance, some follow a clockwise sequence: Eastern

Yue, Northern Yue, Southern Yue and Western Yue, with the Central Yue remaining in the middle. Nevertheless, the corresponding mountain assigned to each corner stays largely unchanged.

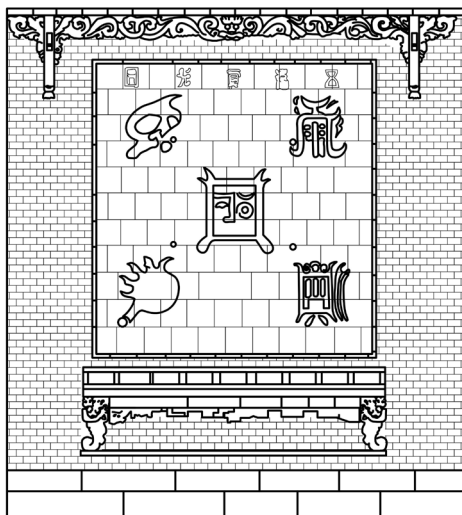


Fig.1 The True Forms of the Five Great Mountains

## 2. Pattern of Mount Tai Shi Gandang

It first appeared in the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), and was widely used throughout the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and Qing Dynasty (1636–1912).

This ornament is placed at inauspicious junctions and crossing spaces of settlements, alleys, roads and residential buildings, such as unfavorable orientations, lane entrances, street corners, house corners, wall tops and ground corners. It is mostly carved on stone slabs, and also seen in brick carving, lime sculpture and painted decoration.

In decorative designs, inscriptions of Mount Tai Stone and Mount Tai Shi Gandang are often combined with patterns of the Eight Trigrams, Tai Chi, deity figures and mythical beasts.

The Mount Tai motif symbolizes the source of all life. Regarded as a sacred divine mountain that nurtures all living things and governs life and death, it embodies the ancient belief: When Mount Tai is at peace, the whole nation rests in peace. Endowed with boundless spiritual power and auspicious blessings, it is an ideal ornament to invite good fortune and ward off misfortune. It holds a unique status and deep emotional significance in people's hearts.

## 3. Patterns of the River Map and Luo Script

Legend has it that over 7,000 years ago, a dragon horse carried the mystical River Map and emerged from the Meng River, a tributary between the Yellow River and Luo River. Based



Fig.2 The Mountain God of Mount Tai (Supreme Sage Golden Elixir Honored Lord, Originator of All Divine Dharma) protects people from disasters and misfortunes.

on the River Map and Luo Script, Fuxi created the Eight Trigrams. As ancient mystical feng shui patterns, the River Map and Luo Script embrace astronomy, geography and ancient science. They are symbolic diagrams of wisdom for understanding all things in the universe, and have profoundly influenced Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, numerology, as well as the origin and development of Chinese civilization.

Originally, the Luo Script was said to contain the flood-control strategies presented by a divine turtle to Yu the Great. Later it evolved into an auspicious heavenly scripture. Ancient people regarded both patterns as symbols of good fortune and evil avoidance.

The River Map consists of fifty-five black and white dots, representing the Numbers of Heaven and Earth. The white dots—1, 3, 5, 7 and 9—are odd numbers that symbolize Yang and Heaven, known as Heavenly Numbers. The black dots—2, 4, 6, 8 and 10—are even numbers that symbolize Yin and Earth, known as Earthly Numbers.

The total sum of Heavenly Numbers is twenty-five, and Earthly Numbers total thirty, signifying that Heaven generates all things and Earth completes them.

The Nine Palaces numbers of the Luo Script take 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9 as odd Yang numbers, and 2, 4, 6 and 8 as even Yin numbers.

Yang numbers prevail and occupy the four cardinal directions, representing the cosmic qi of Heaven. Yin numbers serve as auxiliary and occupy the four diagonal corners, representing the earthly qi of Earth. The number Five resides at the center, belonging to Earth Element. It is the origin of the generating

numbers of the Five Elements, dwelling in the Central Palace and prospering across all four corners.

To remedy deficiencies in the balance of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, ancient people decorated the outer walls of dwellings, the highest courtyard walls, major verandas, horizontal beams, bracket blocks, partition screens and lattice windows with River Map and Luo Script patterns.

Stone carvings of the dragon horse bearing the River Map and the divine turtle carrying the Luo Script were also placed at main gateways of residences. These ornaments are believed

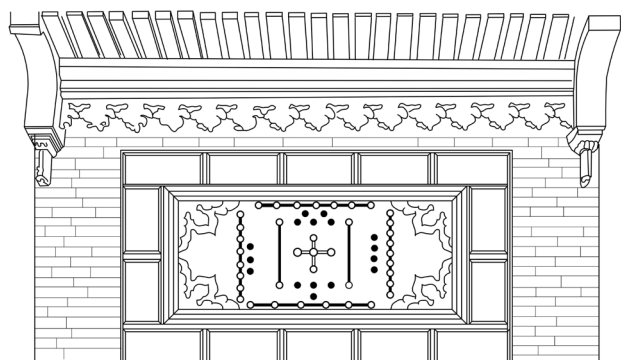


Fig.3 The River Map and Luo Script Symbols for Inviting Blessings and Warding off Misfortune Under the Eaves

to clear confusion, resolve troubles, bless students with academic success, bring prosperity to the family, and ensure the successful completion of great undertakings.

#### 4. Lion Guardian Pattern

As the king of all beasts, the lion has a fierce and formidable appearance, possessing unmatched courage and commanding widespread awe. It is believed to safeguard the continuity and prosperity of a family, dispel misfortune, and invoke blessings. Regarded as an auspicious mythical creature in Chinese tradition, the lion pattern is mainly used to counteract unfavorable environmental features facing a residence, such as gaps in the landscape, steep cliffs, and overly open exposed terrain.

For folk houses with imbalances in Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, stone lions are placed on both sides of the main gate to block negative spiritual influences. Male lion carvings may also be set above door lintels to remedy geomantic flaws, or lion-head ornaments are used alone to ward off ominous forces outside the dwelling.

According to regional customs, geomantic conditions, house styles, and practical needs, different forms and facial expressions of lions are selected for household protection: majestic lions, stern lions, vigilant guardian lions, joyful lions, harmo-



Fig.4-1 Fierce and imposing frontal lion statues are placed to block evil spirits and malevolent energy from entering the residence.



Fig.4-2 Fierce and powerful, the lion with its sharp sword is an efficacious talisman to guard the residence and suppress ill fortune.

nous lions, playful lions, reclining lions, and standing lions, among others.

#### Sword Lion House-Guarding Pattern

The Sword Lion decorative pattern originated in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD). It is commonly mounted above the main gate of settlements and traditional folk dwellings that face water outlets, street entrances, alley mouths, road junctions and crossroads. It can also be placed on the parapet walls of auxiliary buildings.

The lion is portrayed holding its head high and chest out, crouching on the ground with bared fangs and claws. It clenches a short sword in its mouth; the sword hilt usually faces left. In a minority of cases, the sword tip faces right, serving to counteract inauspicious influences on the right side.



The pattern is meant to dispel demons, ward off evil spirits, and soothe mental distress and inner unease.

### Wind Lion Pattern

Also known as Pastoral Wind Lion Lord.

Legend traces its origin to two figures from Fengshen Bang (Investiture of the Gods): either Shen Gongbao or Huang Feihu.

*New Kinmen Chronicle* records:

‘On the rooftops of local houses, one often sees pottery roof ornaments shaped like open-mouthed lions, and others armored in military regalia; they are named Chiyou.’

The Wind Lion is a divine mythical beast believed to subdue wind evils, ward off malignant spirits, protect geomantic fortune, repel water ghosts and hauntings, reduce plagues of pests, and safeguard wealth and fortune. Sculptures and decorative patterns of the Wind Lion Lord can be found everywhere across Kinmen County, Fujian Province.

## 5. Water-Suppressing Divine Beast Pattern

Decorative patterns include Gongfu ( 蚣 虻 / 趴 虻 also known as Baxia), giant oxen, giant rhinoceroses, and other mythical creatures. They are mainly adorned on bridge piers and approach bridges in front of residential buildings, revetment joints, as well as beside wells and water ditches.

Legend holds that Gongfu, or Baxia, is the eldest son of the true dragon. It features a flat dragon head with horns on top, dragon scales covering its body, limbs and tail. With a large mouth and capacious belly, it can endlessly absorb floodwaters and devour water demons. Ancient people believed it could subdue water monsters and mountain spirits, ward off flood disasters, protect farmland and grain supplies, and create a stable and peaceful living environment.

*Biography of the Shu Kings* records: ‘When the river brought severe flooding, Li Bing, the governor of Shu, had five stone rhinoceroses carved. Two were placed in the administrative mansion, one beneath the city market bridge, and two submerged in the river.’

Patterns of giant oxen and giant rhinoceroses are employed to bless the land with peace in all directions and bring timely rains and favorable harvests.

## 6. Remedial Decorative Patterns of the Five Elements Wall

These patterns are mainly used to counteract inauspicious geomantic influences such as road intersection evil energy,

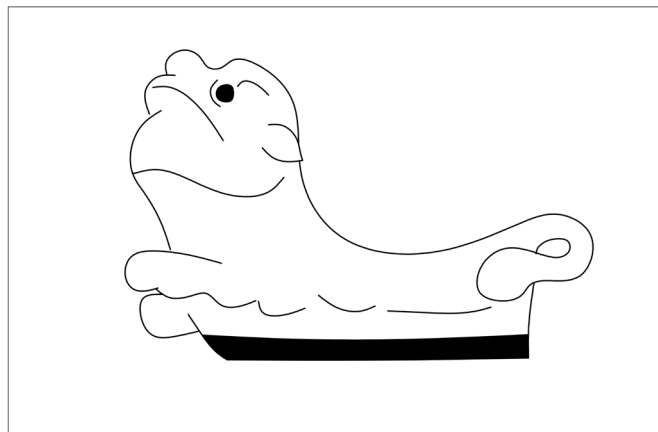


Fig.4-3 Stone Carvings of Wind Lion Lord of the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644 AD): They are generally installed at proper positions on courtyard walls and roof ridges.



Fig.5-1 Stone Carving of the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644 AD): Water-suppressing Gongfu in front of a folk residence.

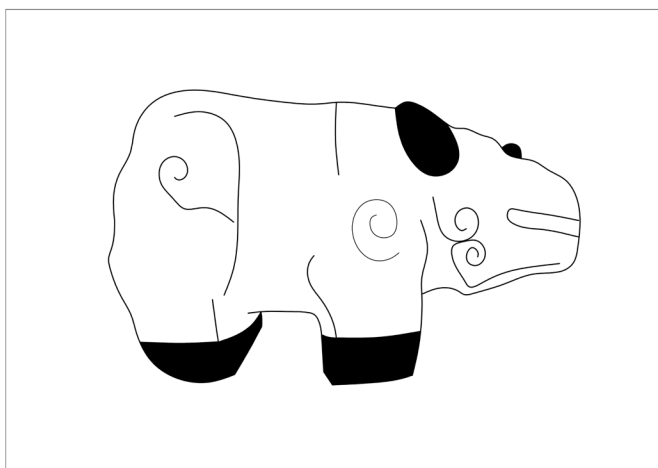


Fig.5-2 Stone Rhinoceros Carving at the marshland in front of a folk residence.

house corner evil energy, backing negative energy, drainage passage evil energy, and foundation formation ominous energy. Based on the owner's birth eight characters, practitioners apply the principles of the Five Elements to determine which type of Five Elements wall should be adopted for the gable walls and wall bases of the traditional dwelling.

Ancient ancestors designed customized Five Elements graphic combinations according to the calculation of the house owner's Yin-Yang and Five Elements fortune. They built Five Elements Walls with bricks, stones and tiles, aiming to gain spiritual peace and mental comfort.

Metal Element Gable: Shaped in a semicircle or full circle. The wall coping is nearly round, and the wall body curves gently outward; round or semi-circular carved blocks are often inlaid at the wall base. It symbolizes authority and wealth.

Wood Element Gable and Wall Base: Designed as a rectangle or a slender modified trapezoid. The wall coping is small and rounded, with a straight and flat wall body. It symbolizes prosperity and spiritual vitality.

Water Element Wall Coping and Wall Base: Formed with wave lines, continuous arcs, or square frames embedded with multiple tall round arches. It symbolizes nourishment, blessing and wisdom.

Fire Element Gable and Wall Base: Presented as triangles or continuous pointed shapes. The wall coping bears sharp peaks, and the wall body gradually broadens downward. It symbolizes prosperity, vitality and brightness.

Earth Element Gable: Built in a square shape or well-grid pattern. The wall looks steady, calm and dignified. It symbolizes stability, solidity, loyalty and integrity.

### 7. Ornamental Patterns of Ci Wen ( 鸱吻 ) and

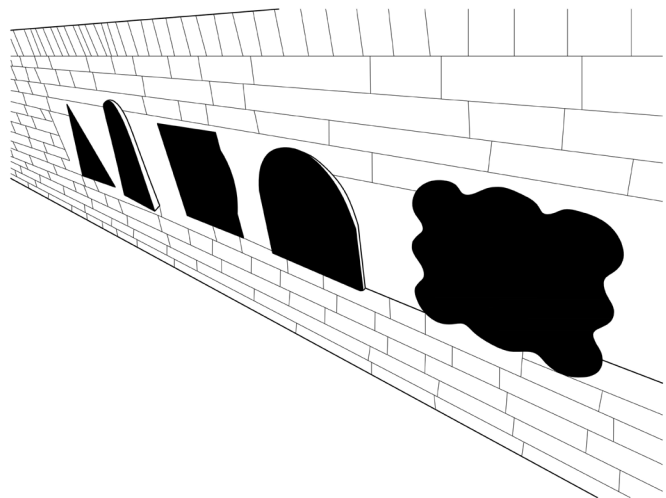


Fig.6-1 Water, Metal, Earth, Wood, Fire (from right to left)

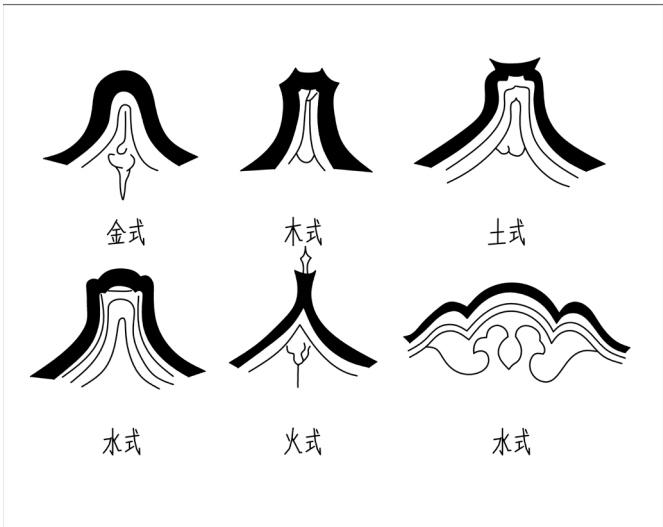


Fig.6-2 Five-Element Wall Coping Built with Brick, Clay and Tile of the Qing Dynasty (1636 – 1912 AD).

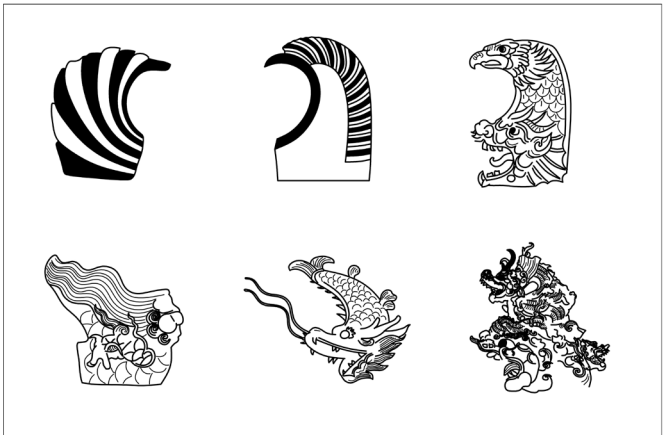


Fig.7-1 Arranged from top to bottom and left to right: Northern Dynasties, Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 AD), Five Dynasties (907 – 960 AD), Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 AD), Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644 AD), Qing Dynasty (1636 – 1912 AD).



Fig.7-2 Brick Carving of the Qing Dynasty (1636 – 1912 AD):Baring fangs and claws, gazing upward into the distance.

## Wang Shou (望兽)

An ancient literary (《上疏》) memorial states: ‘Chi Wei, the essence of water, can ward off fire disasters and may be placed on halls and palace roofs.’

The prototype of Ci Wen is believed to be a giant deepsea whale. It has a broad mouth and a powerful roar, and is by nature fond of swallowing. It devours all demons and spirits and is especially capable of engulfing flames. For this reason, Ci Wen figures are placed on the main roof ridges and upturned eaves to prevent fire. To keep the creature from swallowing the house itself, a sword is fixed upright on its back and head.

Endowed with an affinity for the waters of rivers and seas and possessing divine power over ancient rituals and spiritual charms, Ci Wen and Wang Shou were regarded by ancient people as apotropaic patterns capable of repelling fire and averting calamity. They are also revered as symbolic incarnations that relieve drought, extinguish fires, and safeguard against disasters.

Different from Ci Wen beasts, which face each other and bite the main roof ridge, Wang Shou (Roof Watcher Beasts) are by nature fond of gazing afar, traveling far, evading misfortune, and guarding passes. They look out in all directions, gaze into the distance, observe the world, convey auspicious blessings, and keep watch over the safety of the family dwelling.

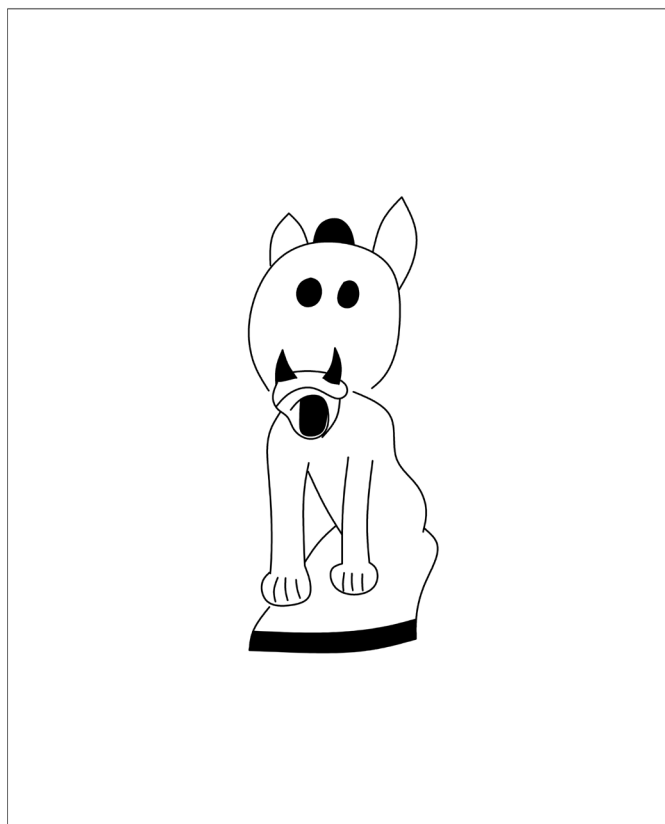


Fig.8. Glazed Pottery Cat, Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644 AD): Crouching above the main gateway and in the middle of the main hall's roof ridge.

## 8. Cat Pattern on Roof Tiles

The cat features a round head, ears pointing upward, protruding large eyes, a wide mouth with a long tongue, and neat rows of sharp teeth. It has slender sloping shoulders and thin elongated limbs. Some are carved with the Chinese character Wang (King) on the forehead, while others are stamped with the Eight Trigrams symbol. This pattern is believed to rectify the geomantic balance of a residence, devour demons and evil spirits, suppress malign influences, and usher in good fortune.

## 9. Roof Apex Evil-Suppressing Patterns

Roof apex ornaments are distinctive decorations on the roof ridges of traditional folk residences, associated with fire prevention, lightning protection, and the dispelling of evil influences. Common pattern styles include pagoda style, pavilion style, gate-tower style, vase style, gourd style, and auspicious beast style. They symbolize the eternal stability of the family foundation and clan heritage, as well as the blessings of Bud-

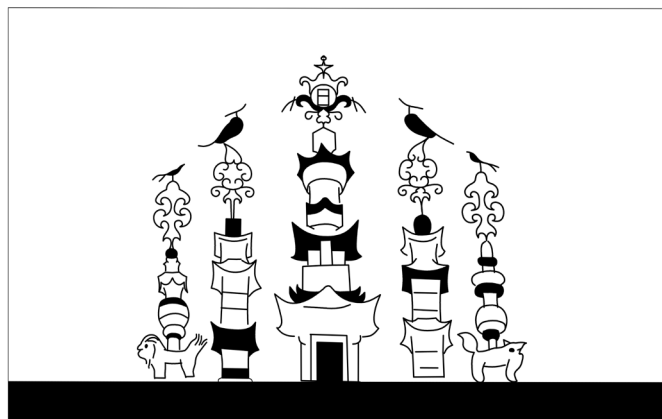


Fig.9. Qing Dynasty (1636 – 1912 AD) glazed roof apex ornament: a composite design of the sun emblem, divine birds, mythical beasts, and pavilion architecture.

dha.

Gourd and precious vase patterns on ridge tops are regarded as ritual talismans to ward off evil and avert misfortune. Pagoda patterns on ridge tops imply Buddha's protection and the expulsion of demons and goblins. Some water-smoke motifs are designed to prevent fires, while flame patterns serve to drive away wandering spirits and phantoms. Aureole patterns are believed to foretell good and ill fortune, blessings and calamities.

## 10. Hanging Fish Remedial Decorative Pattern

The hanging fish ornament is mounted on the gable end of



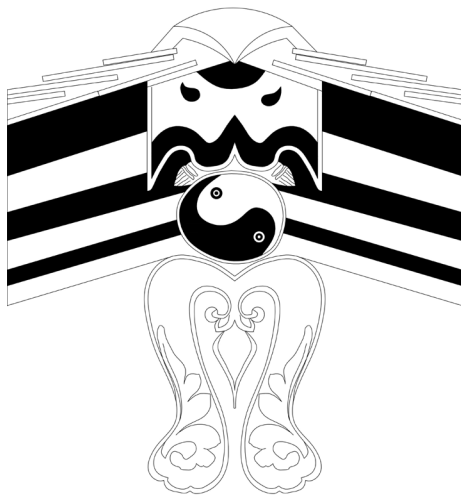


Fig.10-1 Painted lime sculpture of the Qing Dynasty: a hanging fish ornament combined with tiger-tooth, Tai Chi and ruyi patterns.



Fig.10-2 Wood carving of the Qing Dynasty (1636 – 1912 AD): A hanging fish ornament in strip-plate shape combined with inscriptions, symbols and animal patterns.

traditional folk houses. It is generally strip-shaped and crafted in wood carving, brick carving, or glazed tile. The pattern is often integrated with remedial symbolic motifs such as the Eight Trigrams, Tai Chi, the sun, the moon, clouds, and water. It is intended to pursue good fortune and avoid misfortune, prevent fires and ward off disasters, and also serve as a moral warning against bribery. When a corner of a residence suffers unfavorable geographical energy, hanging fish decorated with a combined pattern of the sun, the moon and clouds is adopted. It is believed to generate powerful cosmic energy, strengthen clan cohesion, stabilize family fortune, and boost male vitality.

If the Yin–Yang and Five Elements of the dwelling lack spiritual potency, the Five Stars Convergence pattern is applied to pray for great auspiciousness and prosperity. Where the Five Elements are deficient in water, hanging fish inscribed with the character Ren Water (壬水) is used, carrying the im-

plied meaning of supreme dignity and absolute authority. In cases of imbalanced Yin–Yang and weak fertility among family members, a combination of Tai Chi, the Eight Trigrams and water motifs is adopted.

For an inauspicious corner of a folk residence, hanging fish is decorated with tiger teeth and ruyi patterns, symbolizing mighty vitality, smooth blessings and good fortune.

## 11. Remedial decorative patterns for gateway facade defects

When ancient ancestors designed remedial decorative patterns for gateway facades, their primary consideration was to avoid having the household gate directly facing the neighbor's gate across the alley, as well as preventing roof ridges and upturned eaves from aligning straight toward the gateway facade. Meanwhile, evil-averting patterns were adorned on the curved and dragon-shaped retaining walls, elevated plinths and high steps at the entrance of the main residential gate.

If a dwelling suffered from damp and gloomy conditions, bringing about frequent infestations of centipedes, ants, scorpions and other pests, people would easily fall ill or be haunted by ominous spiritual influences, which were believed to lead to fewer offspring and shortened lifespan. For such problems, ancestors targeted the issue by applying brick carvings, stone carvings and painted decorations with remedial patterns on the lintel, crossbeam, architrave and partition wall of the gateway facade, so as to dispel malevolent spiritual qi.

### (1). Tun Kou (Dun Kou) Pattern

It is a kind of door-knocker-shaped decorative pattern combining the features of dragon, tiger, lion and human head. It has a round head, bulging forehead, upturned nose, a wide open mouth with bared teeth, and a fierce countenance.

Some variations feature a high broad forehead, dog-like ears, dragon eyes, ox nose, long fangs, a grinning mouth and protruding tongue; some hold a sharp sword in the mouth. This mythical creature is integrated with Bagua diagrams, Tai Chi symbols and ancient inscriptions.

Ancient ancestors believed it could devour the Five Poisons, demons and evil spirits that brought calamities to the world. As a sacred beast for exorcising evil and suppressing misfortune, it embodied people's wishes for bumper grain harvests, prosperous families and auspicious well-being for all household members.

Many residential buildings feature decorative patterns of Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches (天干地支), which represent the ancient Chinese calendar system. These patterns emerged as ancient ancestors devised housing orientation and layout arrangements to remedy mismatches among directions,

## Five Elements (五行), and seasons.

As special decorative motifs conceived by Feng Shui (风水) masters (commonly known as Geomancy Masters 地理先生), they take into account the building's location, season, timing, as well as the homeowner's birth year, month, day and hour. Bearing profound architectural Feng Shui implications, their symbolic meanings include: invoking blessings and good fortune, safeguarding the residence for peace, and embodying the cycle of time with endless vitality. They imply that the dwelling aligns with celestial rhythms, bringing peace throughout the four seasons and perpetual prosperity of descendants.

The Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches decorative patterns embody the ancients' way of integrating temporal order into living spaces, expressing aspirations for good fortune and avoiding misfortune, family harmony, and eternal vitality in harmony with cosmic rhythms. Some folk dwellings even adorn every corner with the complete set of Stem-Branch symbols, signifying the full cycle of time and space. This conveys the blessing of the passage of years and endless vitality, as well as hidden wishes for smooth seasons and lasting family fortune.

Furthermore, Stem-Branch patterns function to harmonize directional energy fields. Combined with the building's facing and mountain backing orientation, these symbols correspond to the directional attributes of the Five Elements, balancing Yin and Yang energy within the residence. This achieves the classic geomantic ideal of 'Gathering Wind and Accumulating Vitality, Seeking Benefit and Avoiding Harm', fully conforming to the architectural philosophy of traditional Geomancy.

Directional symbolic patterns such as Jia (甲), Si (巳) and Ren (壬) each carry unique connotations:

Jia, the first of the Heavenly Stems, is a homophone for "noble mansion and official rank", symbolizing success in imperial examinations.

The Si pattern, shaped like a Ruyi scepter, is often used to pray for fire prevention (water restraining fire) and protect household peace. Associated with the Si-Hai (巳亥) pairing and corresponding to the Snake zodiac, it is widely applied to ward off evil spirits and avoid fire disasters.

In particular, the Ren (壬) pattern symbolizes suppressing fire hazards, resolving fiery malevolent influences, and guarding household safety. Its original meaning denotes the transition from extreme Yin to nascent Yang, representing gestation and nourishment; phonetically aligned with Ren (妊 / 任, conception and endurance), it symbolizes latent Yang energy and all things poised for growth. It embodies blessings for family offspring, enduring descendants, and perpetual prosperity of the household. Additionally, Ren carries the meaning of "bearing and upholding", expressing hopes for a stable residence and long-lasting blessings and good fortune.



Fig.11-1 Folk dwelling wood carving: a mask with glaring eyes and the character Ren (壬) engraved on its forehead.

## (2). Remedial Decorative Patterns of Door Pins

In response to unfavorable Five Elements layout of the main gate and its orientation in ancient architecture, ancient people adopted door pins decorated with trigrams and Tai Chi patterns as a remedy, to block evil qi from entering the house and gain spiritual comfort.

For instance, if a residence lacks the **Fire** element in the Five Elements, the trigram ☲ will be carved in stone or painted in color on the lintel for remedy. In folk houses plagued by the Five Poisons, serrated patterns combined with bronze mirror patterns are applied to ward off evil spirits.

Where the gate orientation brings inauspicious influences on the Five Elements, family population and wealth fortune, the

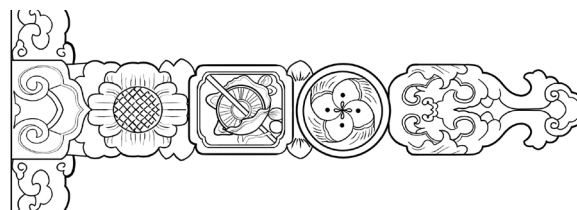


Fig.11-2 Wood carvings of Qing-dynasty folk dwellings: swastika symbols, Eight Trigrams (八卦), coin patterns and other motifs carved on the ends of hairpins

head and tail of door pins are adorned with combined patterns including swastika, Bagua, Tai Chi, copper cash, bronze mirror, double fish, ruyi and inscribed characters to protect the residence and courtyard.

If malevolent aura lingers around the gate, door pins will be decorated with rhinoceros horns, the Eight Immortals' Emblems and Mixed Eight Treasures to dispel ominous energy.

## (3). Door God Remedial Decorative Patterns

Among the most common town-house and courtyard-protecting decorative patterns, door gods rank first. The worship

of door gods originated in the Eastern Han Dynasty. Representative types include Shentu and Yulei of the Eastern Han Dynasty; Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong of the Tang Dynasty; and derivative styles from the Song and Ming dynasties, such as military door gods, civil official door gods, boy door gods, fairy maiden door gods, and Zhong Kui door gods.

For dwellings situated on downhill slopes, steep ridges, mountain gaps, or overly gloomy and secluded terrain, door god patterns are adopted to guard the residence and ward off evil spirits.

Shentu and Yulei, the earliest Eastern Han door gods, were believed to capture ghosts and demons to feed to tigers.

Known as the top door gods of the Tang Dynasty, Qin Shubao and Yuchi Gong are depicted holding paired maces and whips, capable of expelling demons and punishing tyrannical rulers as well as disloyal civil and military officials.

From the Song Dynasty onward, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei became the most celebrated door gods symbolizing loyalty and righteousness. Armed with the Green Dragon Crescent Blade and the Eight-Foot Serpent Spear respectively, they subdue all evil spirits and chastise those guilty of disloyalty and unfilial conduct.

Wei Zheng and Zhong Kui stand as the most righteous door gods, regarded as the vanquishers of all goblins and phantoms.

Zhao Gongming, the God of Wealth, and Zhang Dan, the God of the Hearth, are the most folk-oriented patron deities. They suppress evil forces that harm crops and livestock, safeguarding people's ample food and clothing.



Fig.11-3 Stone carvings of the Song Dynasty: Qin Shubao and Yuchi Gong hold a pair of maces and a pair of whips respectively, to ward off demons and evil spirits

Additionally, the most distinctive, auspicious and aesthetically pleasing types include boy door gods and fairy maiden door gods, who serve as guardian deities for women and children.

#### (4) Remedial Ornamental Patterns of Fairy Door Gods (仙女门神)

These divine female figures are believed to bless women with robust fertility and protect children's healthy growth, embodying the prayer for heavenly auspiciousness and the blessing of new births.

The Fairy Door Gods are depicted as graceful yet heroic. Classic prototypes include legendary female heroines: Fan Lihua, Dou Xiantong, Chen Jinding, Xue Jinlian, Huang Jinling, Diao Yuehong, as well as Mu Guiying and Qin Liangyu. Some are clad in full armor adorned with tall feather plumes, battle robes and ceremonial pennants, wielding swords or long broadswords; others appear in elaborate flowing costumes with billowing ribbons, holding sacred ritual treasures.

#### (5) Remedial Decorative Pattern of Boy Door Gods

Boy door gods are mainly used to counteract adverse feng shui influences such as reduced male descendants, shortened lifespan and scarce blessings, and they also carry the implied



Fig.11-4 Qing Dynasty residential painted ornaments: female door gods depicted in the elegant likeness of traditional court ladies.



meaning of preventing wealth dissipation.

In the pattern: The boy door gods wear amiable smiles. The boy in green holds a tray from which celestial mist drifts, and within the mist appears an elongated Chinese character Shou (Longevity) wrapped in teal ribbons, symbolizing longevity for ten thousand generations. Within the celestial mist surrounding the boy in red are painted mountain rocks and surging waves. Here, mountain rocks symbolize mountains and ridges, while water waves represent rivers, conveying the implication of eternal stability of the nation and landscape.

In other versions, each boy holds a fruit plate filled with pomegranates, narcissus flowers, glossy ganoderma, ruyi scepters and bats. These motifs symbolize good fortune in all undertakings, blessings and longevity, prosperity of sons and grandsons, endless descendants, and joyful embrace of spring prosperity.

Some patterns adopt the classic scene of Guo Ziyi (697–781)



Fig.11-5 Qing Dynasty residential painted decoration: agile and amiable child door gods holding sacred treasures

Attending Court with His Sons as the door god motif. On one side, Guo Jujing (697–781) holds an official tablet, while his son carries a vase with a halberd inserted inside, subtly implying promotion and rising rank threefold. On the other side, Guo Ziyi holds an official tablet accompanied by his son bearing a ruyi scepter, signifying auspiciousness and fulfillment of wishes.

## 12. Remedial Decorative Patterns for Spatial Defects in Folk Dwellings

Halls, corridors and other spaces along the central axis of folk

dwellings serve as shared areas for the entire clan and family. These spaces are closely associated with the prosperity of the clan, growth of population, flourishing academic fortune, as well as auspicious and inauspicious implications concerning birth, aging, illness and death, making them vitally important locations. Therefore, ancient ancestors fully took into account the ideal feng shui elements for such halls. Where spatial defects existed, targeted decorative patterns were adopted for remedy.

### (1) Remedial Decorative Patterns for Structural Defects of Beam Frames

The ridge girder is the most crucial structural component

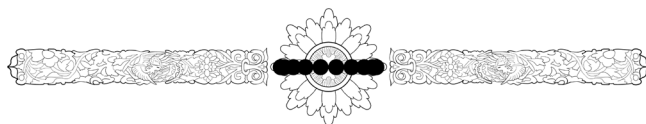


Fig.12-1 Gilded copper-inlaid wood carving in Ming-dynasty folk dwellings: prayer beads interspersed among flowers.

of the entire building. To safeguard the physical and mental well-being of the clan and family, secure prosperity in talent and wealth fortune, and ward off evil spirits and misfortunes, ancient ancestors commonly applied portraits of the Great Emperor Ziwei for remedial purposes. They also used patterns combining the Eight Trigrams, vajra pestles, prayer beads, dragons and phoenixes crafted from gold, silver, copper, tin and iron.

### (2) Remedial decorative patterns of melon posts with Nuo

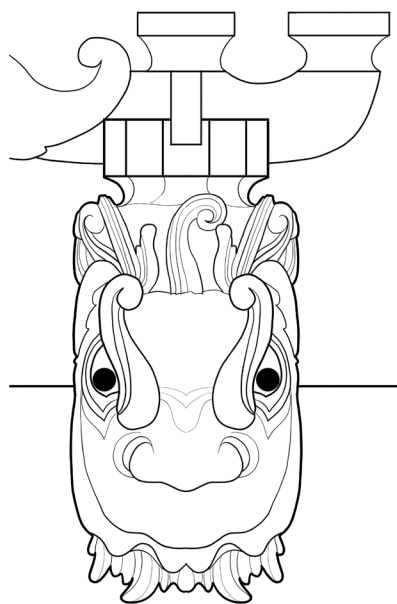


Fig.12-2 Yuan Dynasty Wooden Carving with Lacquer Coloring: A short melon-shaped pillar in the form of a mythical beast resembling a Nuo mask.

masks.

When a residential homestead suffered ill omens such as dwindling descendants and frequent illness, ancient folk residents would adorn the beam framework with Nuo masks, or install hanging melon posts carved with combined human and beast faces to secure the house and ward off misfortune.

### (3) Remedial decorative patterns of sill windows.

Some folk dwellings adopt the shapes and patterns of sill windows and lattice windows to ward off evil spirits and remedy feng shui flaws. For instance: round and square windows are used to make up for the deficiency of the Five Elements; phoenix-eye lattice windows are applied to amplify auspicious energy; irregular-shaped and Bagua-patterned windows

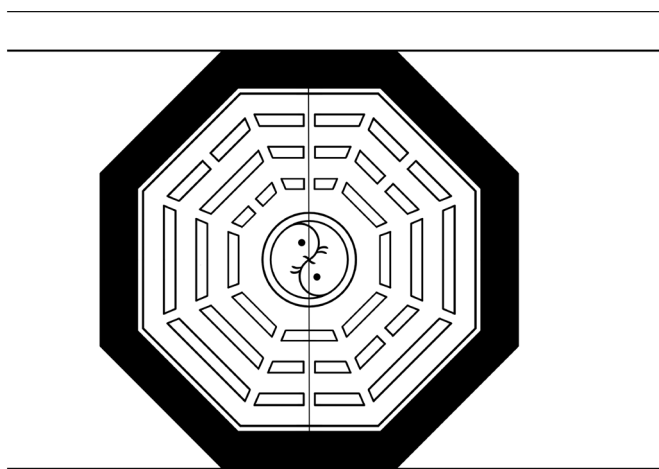


Fig.12-3 Ming Dynasty Wood Carving with Lacquer Decoration: Bagua-shaped Lattice Window.

serve to strengthen the evil-suppressing function; fan-shaped windows are adopted to remedy inadequate literary fortune; lattice windows with swastika fretwork are used to pray for the blessing of Buddha.

For feng shui defects in the east and northeast directions, square windows are deployed to suppress evil spirits; for those in the southeast, irregular-shaped windows are used; for the west and southwest, triangular windows are adopted; for the north and northwest, round windows are applied.

### (4) Remedial Decorative Patterns of Evil-Averting and Blessing Tablets.

This type of decoration is placed in prominent positions of the main hall. The shield-shaped pattern is arranged with a variety of symbolic motifs, including figures representing blessing, official rank and longevity, the Gathering of the Eight Immortals, Liu Hai Playing with the Golden Toad, Dongfang Shuo Stealing Peaches of Immortality, the Heavenly Qilin

Prodigy, the Wealth-Dispensing Boy, the Kui Star Pointing at the Dipper, Magu Presenting Longevity Peaches, the Two Immortals of Harmony and Union, and the Eight Trigrams. Together they form a grand scene of Taoist immortals gathering to ward off misfortune and invoke blessings.

As an ancient weapon, the shield itself is an evil-averting symbol, embodying the implications of defense, divine protection, safety, fortitude and stability. The Eight Trigrams pattern at the center is intended to optimize feng shui, resolve directional clashes, block malevolent influences and dispel evil spirits. It carries psychological connotations of prospering wealth and neutralizing baleful qi, eliminating illness and evil, pursuing good fortune and avoiding calamity, as well as regulating personal vital energy.

Each of the Eight Immortals possesses unique supernatural powers, and their respective ritual implements correspond to different trigram symbols, functioning to expel negative energy, ward off evil and disasters, subdue demons and protect the residence. Within the framework of the Five Elements and Eight Trigrams, the Eight Immortals harmonize Yin and Yang and balance the Five Elements. They also bless children

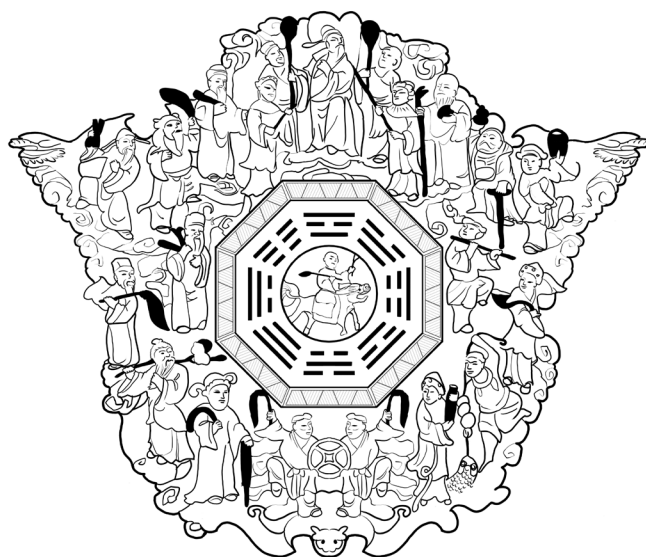


Fig.12-4 Qing Dynasty Wooden Carving with Lacquer Coloring: Shield-shaped ornament, an auspicious blessing tablet composed of figures, immortals and auspicious beasts.

with safe comings and goings, turning misfortune into good luck and ensuring healthy growth. The Heavenly Qilin Prodigy symbolizes perpetual auspiciousness for descendants; Dongfang Shuo and Magu represent longevity; Liu Hai and the Wealth-Dispensing Boy symbolize prosperity and fortune; the Two Immortals of Harmony and Union stand for conjugal harmony, happiness and perfect fulfillment.

### (5) Composite pattern of tiger and leopard heads, immortals, and suanni legs.

Ancient folk people favored auspicious beast patterns combining tiger heads, immortal-style limbs and suanni legs, which were decorated on door lintels, door pillars and furniture legs.

Relying on the majesty, fortitude and auspicious symbolism of tigers and leopards, together with the swift power of suanni legs, such patterns are believed to expel the five poisonous creatures, ward off evil influences, dispel misfortune, and devour all ghosts and spirits.

In Chinese, tiger (虎) is a homophone for blessing (福); leopard (豹) shares the same pronunciation with tidings (报) and subdue (暴). It implies auspicious tigers arriving at the doorstep, blessings arising with the tiger's roar, vigorous vitality, good tidings of peace, and suppressing all evil forces.

(6) Patterns of Qilin, Lion and Seven Stars.

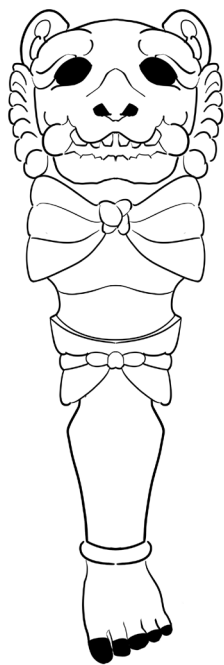


Fig.12-5 Song Dynasty Grey Sculpture with Polychrome Painting: Composite pattern of tiger head, divine shoulders and vajra legs.



Fig.12-6 Qing Dynasty Wood Carving: A lion bearing a Bagua Seven-Star Tablet amid auspicious clouds.

To counteract malevolent qi at the main entrance of folk residences, **\*\*piercing beam evil spirit\*\*** on beams and gateways, **\*\*courtyard patio evil spirit\*\*** in skylight patios, and **\*\*wall blade evil spirit\*\*** indoors, ancient folk people adopted the imagery of qilin facing the rising sun, crowned with the Seven Stars, treading on auspicious clouds and exhaling propitious aura, so as to resolve all inauspicious and baleful influences.

### 13. Remedial Decorative Patterns for Ground Feng Shui Defects

The open yards, eaves and patios between residential buildings serve for daylighting, ventilation, drainage and temperature regulation. When sunlight gently permeates these spaces, it is called Spreading Golden Radiance, symbolizing abundant wealth and incoming fortune. Rainwater falling from surrounding eaves into the patio embodies the principle of Water Returning to the Hall, commonly known as Flowing Silver.

The rainwater flows into drainage holes, passes through underground dragon-shaped hidden ditches, and exits toward the incoming water direction on the left side of the dwelling's orientation. This implies an endless flow of heavenly wealth and vital energy. Such spaces connect the interior and exterior, gathering wind and retaining qi, carrying the auspicious meanings of accumulating wealth, nurturing vital energy, and achieving harmony between humanity and nature.

If the ground of these spaces harbors inauspicious influences that may bring harm to family members, damage talent and fortune, or shorten lifespan, craftsmen would apply remedial decorative patterns on ground-related components. These include door buttress stones, door thresholds, golden pillars under eaves, plinths, ventilation openings, dedicated cat-and-dog access holes, water inlet and outlet holes, stylobates and steps. Common patterns adopted for remedy include the Eight Trigrams, Taiji, coin patterns, qilin, deer, and endless knot.

To keep the residence as steady as Mount Tai, safe and peaceful for generations, single or multiple script-sealing stones are placed along the central axis. They are intended to permanently stabilize auspicious fortune of the household. To prevent wealth from leaking away, sealing stones at water inlet and outlet holes are decorated with swastika symbols, ancient coin motifs, and Armored General patterns.

In times of adverse annual fortune, physical and mental illness, misfortune to family members, shortened lifespan, or stagnant official career, ancient folk people would arrange combined patterns of deer, crane, bamboo, ganoderma lucidum and endless knot on door buttress stones and patio grounds. These patterns are believed to reverse bad luck, eliminate illness, bless physical health, and ensure a prosper-



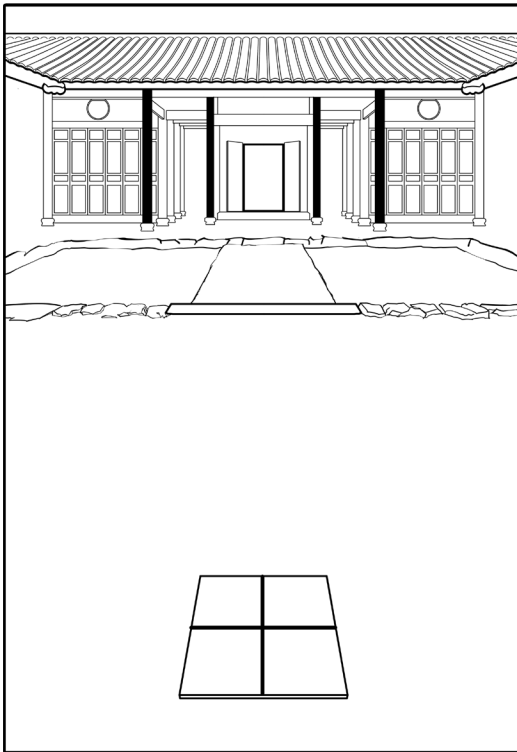


Fig.13-1 Qing Dynasty Stone Carving: Scripture-Sealing Stone on the ground of the central-axis courtyard of a folk residence.

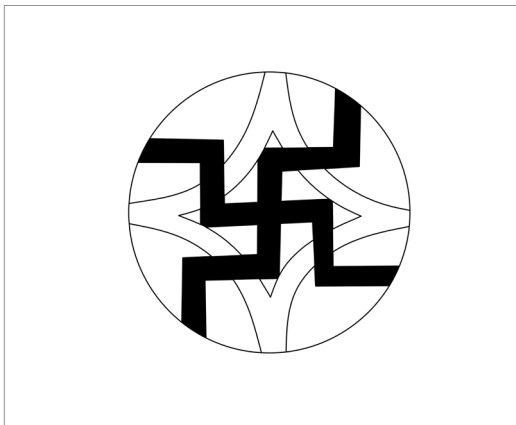


Fig.13-2 Qing Dynasty stone carving: The swastika pattern tightly encloses the coin-hole-shaped drainage hole.

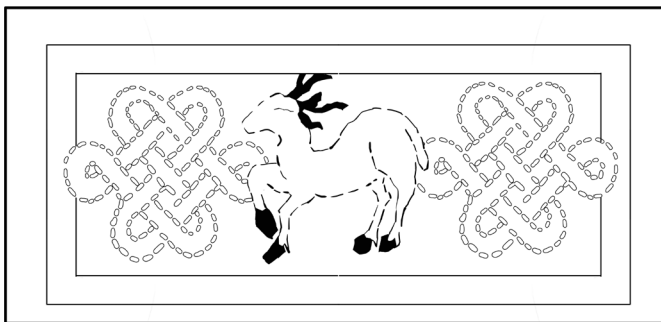


Fig.13-3 Pebble Pavement in the Courtyard of Qing-dynasty Vernacular Dwellings: Combined pattern of the Pan Chang Knot (Chinese Knot) and deer.

ous official career.

#### 14. Remedial Decorative Patterns on Vernacular Dwelling Details.

When a residence suffers from an unfavorable orientation, poor lighting, cramped space, unstable backing mountain, steep mountain ridge in the front, insufficient left and right guardian mountains, or deficient vitality in the architectural surroundings—especially when the Five Elements are unbalanced, and the entrances and exits (main gate, inner door, corridor gate) conflict with auspicious geomantic factors—ancient people would decorate evil-averting patterns on the beam frames, lintels, eaves corridors, roof corners, parapet walls, door headers, door lintels, chamber doors and other parts of vernacular dwellings.

The purposes are to pursue peaceful residence, happy life, prosperous career, thriving family fortune, smooth official luck, ward off evil influences, and expel ghosts and goblins.

##### (1) Black Tortoise (Tortoise and Snake) House-Guarding Pattern

The ritual of divination with tortoise shell and yarrow stalks to inquire fortune and misfortune from heaven and earth has influenced the Chinese mindset for thousands of years.

Ancients believed the tortoise possessed the power to predict future fortune and misfortune, and was a spiritual creature that dispelled disasters and avoided calamities.

*The Book of Rites · Qu Li* records: ‘Yarrow symbolizes longevity; tortoise symbolizes perpetuity. A tortoise gains spiritual insight after a thousand years, and yarrow acquires divine power after a hundred years. By virtue of their long lifespan, they are able to distinguish good fortune from misfortune.’

In paintings centered on the Black Tortoise, set amid ruyi cloud patterns on bracket blocks, the Black Tortoise carries a heavenly scripture on its back and looks back over its shoulder. It symbolizes exorcising demons and spirits and remaining invincible against all malevolent forces.

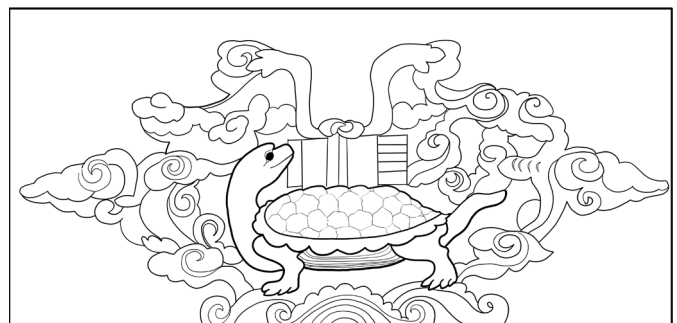


Fig.14-1 Qing-dynasty Wood Carving: Black Tortoise Bearing Sacred Scripture Amid Auspicious Clouds.

## (2) Bagua Remedial Decorative Patterns

In ancient Chinese architecture, the Bagua (Eight Trigrams) diagram is widely adopted as an auspicious motif to dispel misfortune and ward off disasters.

The philosophy and culture of the Bagua boast a long history and have been deeply rooted in people's minds for thousands of years. Ancient people purposely decorated Bagua patterns on corresponding parts of ancient buildings to achieve the psychological effect of invoking good fortune and avoiding calamities, aiming to remedy adverse geographical conditions such as solitary peaks, gullies, frontal ridges, steep slopes and flood hazards.

Its main expressive forms are interlocking floral scrolls combined with Bagua motifs.

The slightly raised trigram pattern ☲ (Li, Fire Trigram), crafted in reddish-brown stucco on a black background, is used to remedy the geomantic flaws of houses facing due south. It is applied when there are drainage ditches, gaps or steep cliffs between mountains near the residence, or straight-ridged mountain farmlands facing the house; or when the house owner lacks the Fire element in the Five Elements, suffers from excessive Yang energy throughout the four seasons, and is deficient in red and florid hues among the Five Colors.

The Li trigram ☲ consists of two Yang lines and one Yin line, embodying the harmony of Yin and Yang and the mutual complementation of Water and Fire. For this reason, it was chosen by ancient people as a geomantic remedial decorative pattern.

It carries the meaning of brightness, symbolizing the trait of being firm without yet yielding externally, warm yet calm internally. It is believed to sharpen perception, promote physical health, bless the family with prosperous descendants generation after generation, and bring harmony to the household and prosperity to all undertakings.

Some residential decorations adopt combined patterns of Bagua and soaring dragons. Dragons are endowed with divine attributes such as connecting heaven and earth, adaptability, spiritual transcendence, omening auspiciousness, foretelling misfortune, and manifesting majesty, possessing all geomantic virtues for protecting the dwelling.

The motif implies supreme good fortune and unshakable peace as firm as Mount Tai. It also echoes the Confucian tenet of *\*\*self-cultivation, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world\*\**. Additionally, it symbolizes the traditional ethic that women manage domestic affairs while men take charge of external affairs, representing harmonious coexistence, mutual respect and affection between men and women.

## (3) Taiji Remedial Decorative Pattern

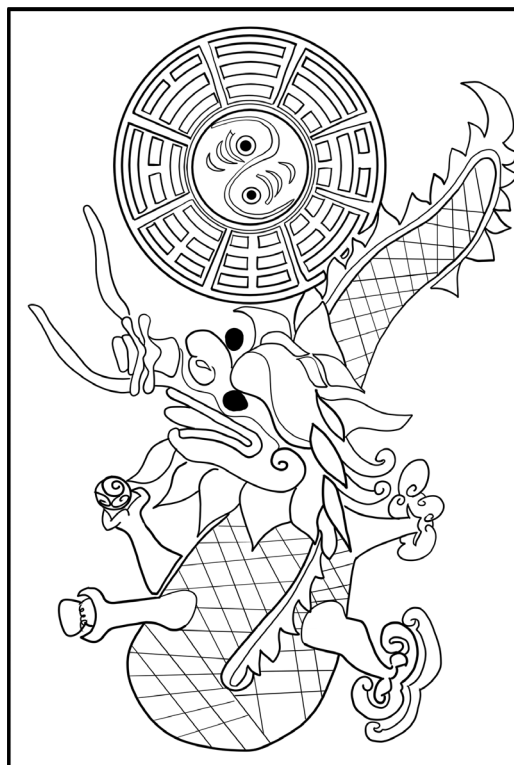


Fig.14-2 Ming Dynasty Stone Carving : Cloud dragons soaring in the firmament, and Eight Trigrams frolicking in the sky.

Also known as the Yin-Yang Fish, it is praised as the No.1 Pattern of China. Historical documents record multiple versions of the Taiji Diagram, including the Zhou-style Taiji Diagram, the Innate Taiji Diagram, and the Lai-style Circular Diagram. Nevertheless, the only mature and standard form of the Taiji Diagram is the small-headed Yin-Yang Fish design established by Zhao Huqian (1351–1395) of the Ming Dynasty.

It implies the unity of opposites, symbolizes auspicious reunion, and embodies blessings for peace, good fortune, and the warding off of evil spirits. In decorative patterns, the Taiji Diagram is mostly rendered in black and white, with occasional red-and-black combinations. The circular pattern is divided equally into two independent halves.

Three-eyed and four-eyed Yin-Yang Fish patterns are extremely rare; their differing structural arrangements carry distinct symbolic meanings. Double Taiji Diagrams arranged side by side embody the philosophy of two elements merging into one. The black fish eye symbolizes Yin, and the red fish eye symbolizes Yang. This conforms to the universal principle that all things are composed of Yin and Yang, signifying harmonious coexistence. It also implies that husbands (Yang) and wives (Yin) should maintain a harmonious and intact family after marriage, and possesses the geomantic effect of protecting residences. Additionally, it symbolizes prosperity in livelihood and production, as well as abundance of talents and wealth.

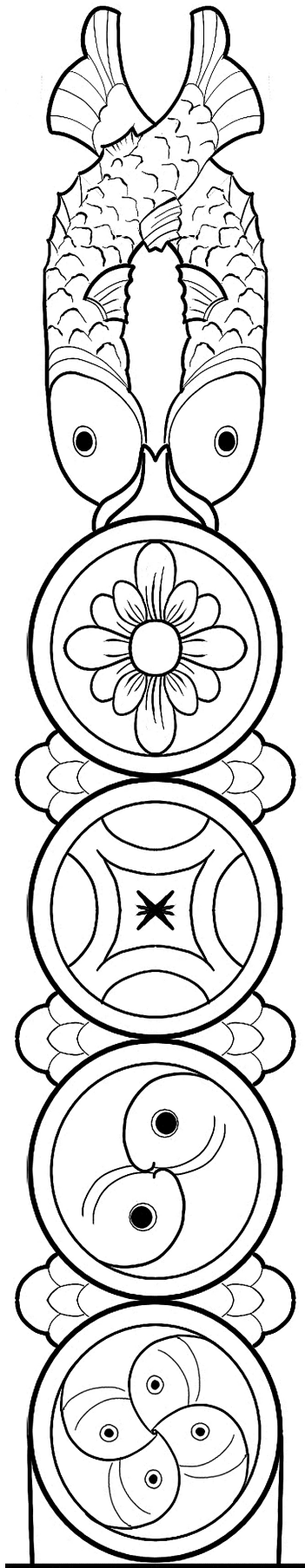


Fig.14-3-1 Painted Wood Carving of the Qing Dynasty: Combination of four-eyed Taiji, two-eyed Taiji, coin patterns, floral patterns and double fish. (The Chinese pronunciation of double fish carries an auspicious homophonic meaning, symbolizing wealth and accumulated savings.)

Vertically arranged Yin-Yang Fish represent positivity and upward vitality, the integration of Heaven and Earth, and the harmony between humanity and nature. The lower Taiji Diagram embodies attributes of tranquility, introversion, and gentleness, conveying the implied meaning of the intercourse of Heaven and Earth, bringing health, peace and perfect bliss.

Notably, four-eyed and four-colored Taiji Diagrams can often be seen on door ornaments and gable parapets of traditional folk residences. The fish bodies adopt four hues: emerald green, earth red, cream beige, and dark black. Except for the red fish with a red pupil and no black rim, the other three fish feature black pupils encircled by black rings. This design is closely associated with the Five Elements and Five Colors theory, pursuing Five Elements harmony with the surrounding geographical environment—including nearby stream banks, terraced land, and mountain formations.

Such patterns also incorporate stylized tiger faces symbolizing majestic vitality, as well as agile and powerful leopard foreheads, brows and canine teeth. Suspended beneath the leopard's fangs is a Taiji Diagram. In Chinese, the pronunciations of tiger and leopard are homophonic with blessings and good fortune. Combined with the Taiji Diagram, they symbolize the balance of Yin and Yang, universal harmony, lasting blessings, auspicious karma, and the fulfillment of all wishes.

What makes it most distinctive is that decorative ornaments



Fig.14-3-2 Qing Dynasty Wood Carving: The Taiji Immortal dances joyfully while frolicking with the Dog Star.



of some traditional residential buildings feature patterns of the Taiji Immortal. In the design, the Taiji Immortal wears an ornate crown and magnificent robe, with a ruyi scepter slung over the shoulder. The right hand holds the Taiji emblem high, while the left hand forms a ritual mudra. His left foot is raised to play with the Dog Star, which exhales celestial mist and three aligned stars from its mouth.

The Taiji Immortal is a patron deity of the heavens, endowed with extraordinary power and wisdom. The Dog Star is a divine creature symbolizing good fortune, wealth attraction, peace, and the dispelling of evil spirits. The alignment of three stars represents good luck, smooth sailing, and prosperity.

#### (4) Remedial decorative pattern of rhinoceros horn.

According to legend, burning rhinoceros horns during sacrificial rituals allows people to behold desired worldly forms as well as evil spirits, hence it is regarded as a sacred artifact. In the imagination of the ancients, rhinoceros horns possessed extraordinary powers of detoxification, spiritual communion, warding off evil spirits, subduing demons, and safeguarding peace.

In the decorative patterns of traditional residential buildings, rhinoceros horn motifs are shaped like cones or square pyramidal tips, presented as either a single horn or a paired double-horn combination.

#### (5) Town-house talisman plaque pattern.

Such wooden plaques for securing the residence are mostly placed on the shrine inside folk dwellings, in ritual halls, at the corner of the gable in ancestral halls, or on the beam framework of the porch and corridor of the main hall. They commonly take the form of double-sided wood carving with calligraphy.

One side is carved with the Taiji and Eight Trigrams, recording the feng shui orientation of the house as well as the evil-suppressing scales of the Lu Ban Ruler. The other side features evil-resolving and auspicious talismanic patterns, together with inscriptions invoking blessings from various deities to protect the clan and family.

#### (6) Talisman remedial decorative patterns.

Fuba pattern, also known as Taoba. Ancient people attached great importance to dispelling evil influences and defilements in folk residences. For instance, cicada-shaped hanging talismans were hung on the ridge beams and lamp frames of main halls and ritual halls; ink-written talisman-inscribed river pebbles were placed on the left ground or buried underground in ancestral halls and ritual halls.

A variety of talismans were adopted for feng shui remediation, including Ground-breaking Talisman, Beam-raising Talisman, Harmony Talisman, Healing Talisman, Livestock



Fig.14-4 Qing Dynasty Wood Carving: Combined pattern of a *whisk* and double rhinoceros horns.



Fig.14-5 Black-patterned wooden carved plaque of the Qing Dynasty: Combined patterns of the Eight Trigrams, Taiji and Taoist talismans.

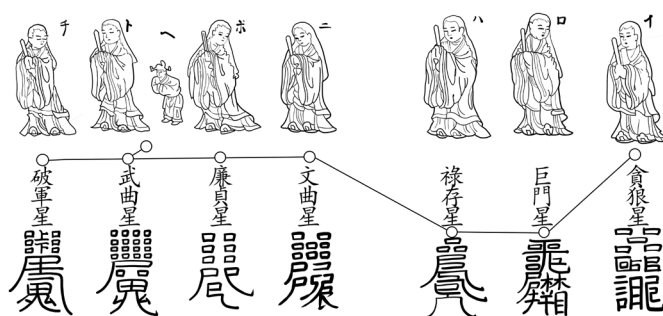


Fig.14-6 Qing Dynasty Line Drawing: Combined patterns of immortals and symbolic signs.

Protection Talisman, Wealth and Profit Talisman, House-protecting Talisman, Auspicious Blessing Talisman, and Official Rank & Prosperity Talisman.

When a house faces inauspicious geomantic conditions such as direct alignment with roads, street crossings, alley entrances, or opposite doorways of neighboring residences, targeted

talisman remedial decorative patterns would be installed on door lintels, door beams and door top stones. They were also combined with gourd talismans to resolve evil spiritual clashes at the main gate of the courtyard, so as to ensure the prosperity of the clan.

Their functions are to eliminate illness and secure the residence, pray for good harvests, ward off disasters and misfortunes, grant smooth fortunes in daily life, and bring high official positions and generous emoluments.

#### (7) Five Poisons remedial decorative patterns

The Five Poisons, also known as Five Essences, consist of centipede, gecko, spider, scorpion and snake.

A centipede is a multi-legged creature that remains resilient even when broken and enduring despite severe damage. Geckos are actually non-toxic. Spiders are also regarded as joyful auspicious insects in folk culture.

In the pattern, a bright full moon hangs in the sky, and a noble sage extracts venom from a scorpion.

In Chinese homophony, the character for poison ( 毒 ) sounds the same as alone ( 独 ), implying a noble person maintains virtue and self-discipline when alone. The close-up of the scorpion's hard carapace, with its stinger curved forward specially, symbolizes ranking first among all.

When paired with pangolin and tortoise shell, it signifies dominating a region with unparalleled strength. Scorpion sounds identical to bearing a noble son ( 携子 ), representing the arrival of blessed offspring and prosperous descendants for generations.

With numerous legs, the scorpion symbolizes wealth flowing in from all directions, smooth affairs and continuous success.

Ancient ancestors believed the Five Poisons could subdue all toxins and evil spirits, serving as amulets to protect dwellings. Decorating with Five Poisons aims to ward off evil and

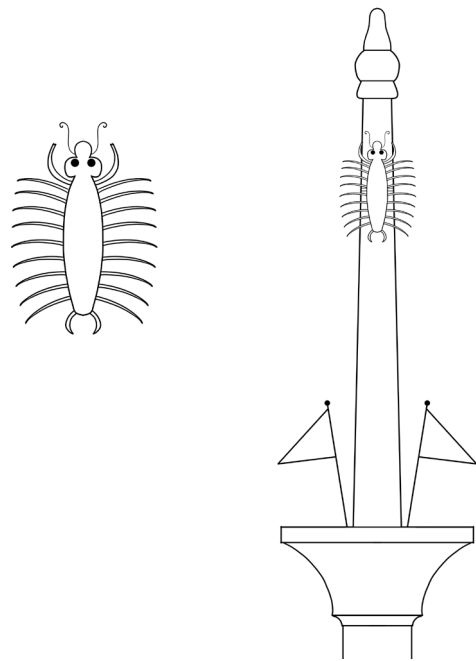


Fig.14-7 Qing Dynasty Stone Carving and Iron Art: Stone-carved flag base, iron-work centipede and triangular streamer.

disasters, and safeguard permanent peace.

Centipedes eliminate pests in damp places, with powerful vitality and vigorous momentum, embodying yin-yang balance and overcoming evil with evil to ensure safety.

Scorpions paired with ingots, or scorpion pincers holding coins, represent great wealth and supremacy over worldly treasures.

To counter ominous influences at ancient building entrances, centipedes—the foremost of the Five Poisons—were carved on stone flagpoles and door lintels. By overcoming poison with poison, they turn misfortune into good luck, dispel evil calamities and eliminate all illnesses.

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# Confucian Figure Patterns in China's Traditional Residences

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Confucianism is the core value of Chinese culture, and its ideas—such as “family and country first,” loyalty to China, filial piety to parents, and kindness to others—have been deeply rooted in the hearts of the Chinese people for thousands of years. For the ancient Chinese people, patterns reflecting Confucian thoughts were their favorite decorations for traditional residences. These patterns show the core Confucian virtues: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, trustworthiness, filial piety, fraternity, loyalty, integrity, shame, diligence, courage, respect, forgiveness, prudence, frugality, forbearance, friendship, kindness, and harmony. Many stories about Confucian sages, virtuous people, and their teachings in China’s history have become the best materials for these residence decorations.

For example, there are patterns about Confucius (551 BCE – 479 BCE) and his disciple Yan Hui (521 BCE – 481 BCE) cooking porridge together, Gao Chai (521 BCE – ?) respecting the elderly and caring for his family, Confucius asking farmers for directions, and the “Six Arts” explained in *The Analects·Shu Er* (a classic Confucian book). The “Six Arts” refer to six basic skills that Confucian scholars in ancient China needed to master: etiquette (including philosophy, politics, and moral education), music (music, dance, calligraphy, and painting), archery (military skills), charioteering (driving skills), calligraphy (literature and history), and mathematics (science and business). Other famous stories, such as Yang Shi (1053 CE – 1135 CE) standing in the snow to wait for his teacher, Li Dong (1093 CE – 1163 CE) fighting against the Jin Dynasty to defend China, and quotes from Zhu Xi’s Neo-Confucianism, are also common themes in residence decorations.

## 1. The “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues” Patterns

The “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues” are important moral standards in Chinese Confucianism. Confucius (551 BCE – 479 BCE), Mencius (372 BCE – 289

BCE), and Xunzi (313 BCE – 238 BCE) all discussed the “Three Cardinal Guides,” which refer to the relationships: the ruler guides his ministers, the father guides his sons, and the husband guides his wife. The “Five Constant Virtues” are benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness—five unchanging moral principles advocated by Confucianism.

These patterns are often expressed in interesting and easy-to-understand ways, using homophones (similar-sounding words) in Chinese:

- There are 3 large vats (the Chinese word for “vat” sounds the same as “guide”) arranged horizontally or vertically, and 5 virtuous people or 5 cute children tasting wine (the Chinese word for “taste” sounds the same as “constant”). Sometimes, 5 scholars gather around one large vat to chat and taste wine.
- In some interesting designs, 3 vats are placed crookedly in a row. Zhong Kui (a mythical figure in Chinese culture who catches ghosts) and 4 ghosts are either tasting wine with bamboo ladles, hiding in the overturned vats, or drunk beside the vats—Zhong Kui laughs happily. This design uses homophones to imply the “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues.”
- Other patterns show imperial crowns (symbolizing the ruler), official hats and uniforms, or a prime minister holding a memorial tablet. Some show a minister kneeling before the emperor (reflecting “the ruler guides his ministers”), a son kneeling to listen to his father (reflecting “the father guides his sons”), or a husband reading/writing while his wife grinds ink or serves tea (reflecting “the husband guides his wife”).
- Some patterns combine the Five Constant Virtues with a scholar feeding goldfish by a fish tank, or 5 literati with wine pots and cups, with a plaque carved with “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, trustworthiness” behind them. There are also figures representing each virtue: a Confucius-like scholar bowing (benevolence), a Guan Gong-like general on horseback (righteousness), a Dharma-like monk bowing respectfully (propriety), a Zhuge Liang-like scholar

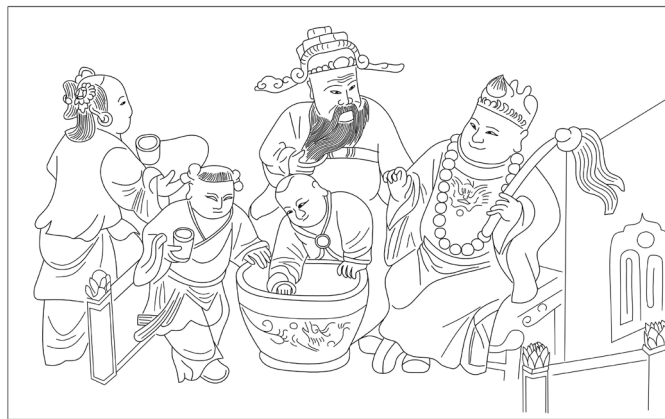


Fig.1 Qing Dynasty (1636 CE – 1912 CE) · Wood Carving: Five adults and children surrounding large vats, implying the «Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues.»

shaking a fan (wisdom), and an emperor giving instructions (trustworthiness).

## 2. The “Standing in the Snow at Chengmen” Pattern

This pattern comes from *History of the Song Dynasty·Biography of Yang Shi*. Yang Shi (1053 CE – 1135 CE) was a scholar from Jiangle, Fujian Province, China. He loved studying and traveled around to find good teachers. In spreading Cheng-style Neo-Confucianism, he gradually formed his own school of thought, known as “Guishan Neo-Confucianism.”

One winter, Yang Shi and his friend You Zuo went to Songyang Academy at the foot of Junji Peak in Dengfeng City, China, to visit their teacher Cheng Yi (1033 CE – 1107 CE). It happened that Cheng Yi was resting, so the two men waited outside the door. The weather was extremely cold, and snow covered everything, but Yang Shi stopped You Zuo from waking their teacher several times. When Cheng Yi woke up, he found two “snowmen” outside the door. He was deeply moved and taught Yang Shi wholeheartedly, passing on all his knowledge to him.

The patterns usually show: Yang Shi and You Zuo standing in front of a thatched cottage covered with heavy snow and ice; or the two men standing quietly outside the door while Cheng Yi naps on a bed by a warm brazier inside; sometimes they stand at the gate pavilion or the open space in front of the main door. Some patterns even show them standing outside a screen, while Cheng Yi dozes at his desk.

This pattern teaches people that to gain true knowledge and make progress, besides studying hard on their own, they must respect their teachers and be pious in learning. Yang Shi became a model of respecting teachers and academic knowledge in China, and this story has become a traditional virtue of the Chinese nation. It also tells people that only by being polite



Fig.2 Ming Dynasty (1368 CE – 1644 CE) · Colored Painting: Yang Shi and You Zuo standing under the eaves in the snow.

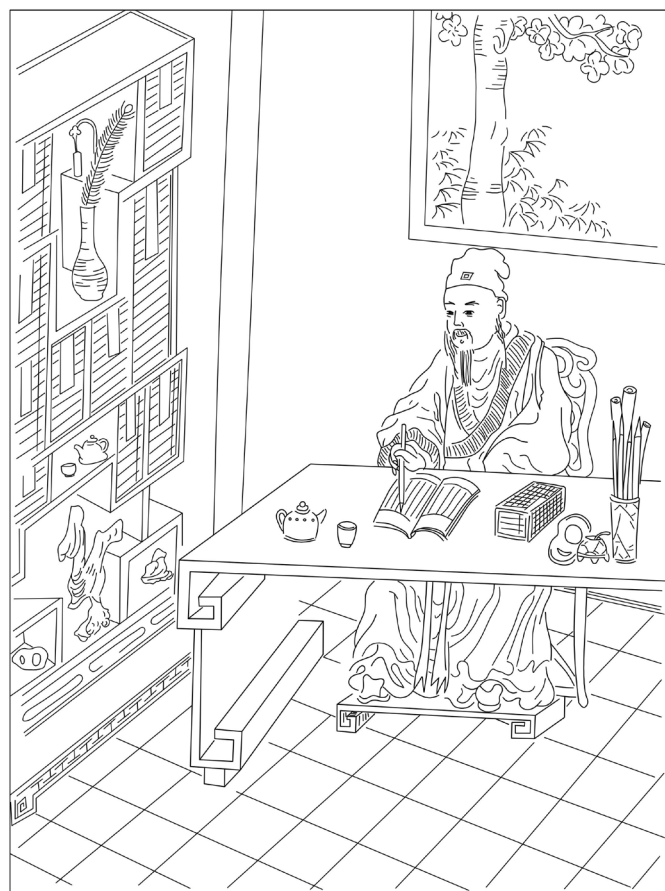


Fig.3 Qing Dynasty (1636 CE – 1912 CE) · Wood Carving: Zhu Xi compiling the Four Books and Five Classics in his study.

and modest can we keep improving and achieve success.

## 3. The Zhu Xi Patterns

Zhu Xi (1130 CE – 1200 CE) was a famous Neo-Confucianist, thinker, philosopher, educator, and poet in China’s Song

Dynasty (960 CE – 1279 CE). He is known as the “great master of Confucian Neo-Confucianism” and the “synthesizer of Neo-Confucianism.” His ancestral home was Wuyuan County, Huizhou Prefecture (now Wuyuan County, Jiangxi Province, China), and he was born in Youxi, NanJian Zhou (now Youxi County, Fujian Province, China).

He is the only person who was not a direct disciple of Confucius but was enshrined in the Confucius Temple, ranking among the Twelve Philosophers in the Dacheng Hall (the main hall of the Confucius Temple). His Neo-Confucianist thoughts had a profound influence on China, becoming the official philosophy of the Yuan (1271 CE – 1368 CE), Ming (1368 CE – 1644 CE), and Qing (1636 CE – 1912 CE) dynasties. His book *Annotations on the Four Books* became the official textbook and the standard for the imperial examination (the ancient Chinese examination system for selecting officials).

The patterns often show scenes such as Zhu Xi questioning heaven, the poem “All flowers are blooming in spring,” a half-acre square pond with flowing water (a metaphor for knowledge), the “Ehu Debate” (a famous academic debate he participated in), reading in four seasons, Zhu Xi in an academy, and his self-portrait. Auxiliary patterns include his works such as *Annotations on the Four Books*, *Explanation of the Taiji Diagram*, and *Explanation of the Tongshu*, which are placed on desks or antique shelves. His courtesy names (used in ancient China) such as Zhonghui, Huian, and Huiweng are often signed in the patterns.

#### 4. The Zhu Bolu Patterns

Zhu Bolu (1617 CE – 1688 CE), also known as Master Zhu’s Family Motto, was a famous Neo-Confucianist and educator in the late Ming Dynasty (1368 CE – 1644 CE) and early Qing Dynasty (1636 CE – 1912 CE) in China. Based on Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, he advocated combining knowledge with practice and wrote dozens of textbooks for teaching. His most famous work, *Master Zhu’s Family Motto*, clearly explains the ways of self-cultivation and family man-



Fig.3 Qing Dynasty (1636 CE – 1912 CE) · Wood Carving: Zhu Xi compiling the Four Books and Five Classics in his study.



Fig.4-2 Qing Dynasty (1636 CE – 1912 CE) · Wood Carving: A father teaching his son to get up at dawn to clean the courtyard.

agement, advising young people to be diligent and thrifty in managing their families and to be content with their lot.

The patterns often show the full text of the family motto, or popular excerpts such as “Rise at dawn... Every bowl of porridge and every meal should remind you of the hard work behind them; every thread and every strand should make you cherish the resources.” These words are written in different calligraphy styles and decorated with auxiliary patterns on the main wall of the living room, the core position of the study, or made into large screens or shrines in traditional Chinese residences.

The purpose of these patterns is to teach students that “self-cultivation,” “family management,” and “learning lies in moral character, and career lies in loyalty and filial piety” are the lifelong goals of life.

#### 5. Patterns of the Integration of Three Religions

Folk tradition features a popular residential decorative pattern



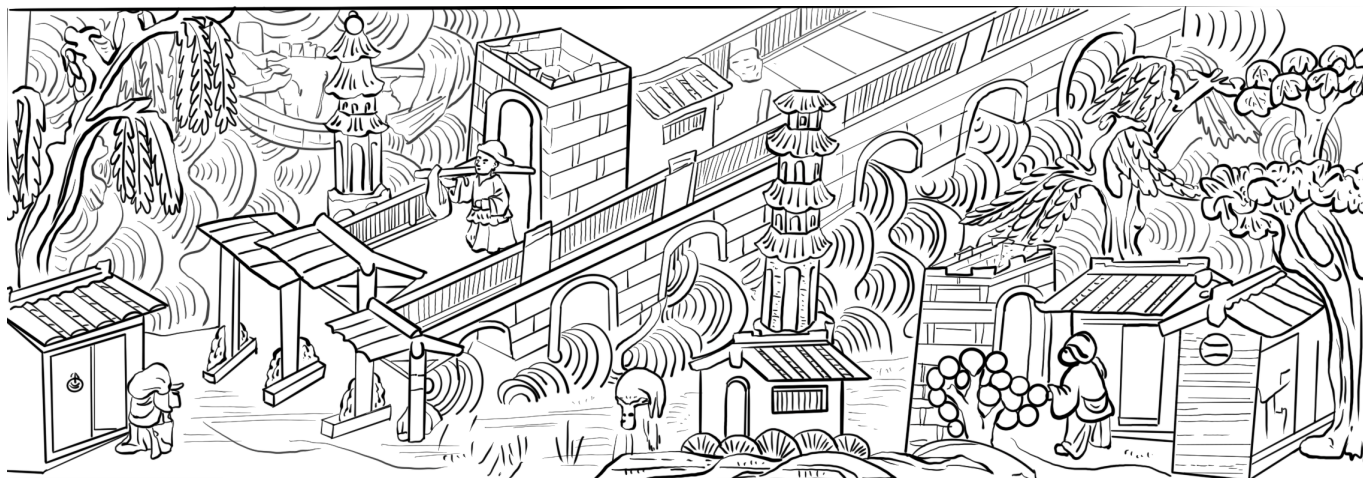


Fig.5-1 Wood Carving of the Qing Dynasty: Integrated Architecture of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism

embodying the confluence of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Originating in the Northern and Southern Dynasties, this pattern took initial shape in the Tang and Song dynasties, and evolved into a mainstream social ideology during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It constitutes a vital part of ancient Chinese philosophical history and traditional culture.

The three religions complement and interact with one another, integrating their doctrines while reaching the same destination via different paths. Confucianism long held a dominant ideological role, governing the ethical and moral norms of the Chinese people. Ancient people revered the sages of these three faiths, and decorated residential spaces with composite patterns combining Confucian saints, Buddhist Bodhisattvas, and Taoist immortals.

#### Water Outlet Settlement Patterns of the Three Religions

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, such patterns prevailed in cultural settlement zones, water outlet spaces, residential dwellings, academies and shrines across Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangxi and other regions. In the ancestors' perception, Confucianism represented essential life philosophy, Taoism embodied the essence of health preservation and spiritual cultivation, and Buddhism fulfilled the mortal longing for liberation from suffering and attainment of bliss.

In these patterns, Confucian elements occupy the primary position, supplemented by Buddhist and Taoist motifs. The composition depicts a landscape basin imbued with Confucian culture, dotted with architectural complexes of the three religions: the Jixia Academy, Pavilion of Guanyin, Kuixing Tower, covered corridors and folk residences are arranged in a well-proportioned integrated space. The design aims to create an ideal living realm of the integrated three religions, praying for divine blessing for human prosperity, freedom from illness and disaster, longevity, good fortune, and harmonious well-being.

## 6. Figural Patterns of the Integrated Three Religions

The Buddhist precept of no killing, Confucian emphasis on filial piety and human ethics, and Taoist tenets of *Tao follows nature* and *unity of humanity and heaven* are perfectly fused in these patterns. Combined motifs embody Confucian core values: reverence for heaven, ritual propriety, inherent goodness, perseverance, emulation of virtuous role models, ancestor worship, filial piety to kin, loyalty, trustworthiness, benevolence and righteousness. Adorning folk residences with such integrated patterns stood as a remarkable innovation of ancient people.

### Harmonious Unity Pattern (All-Embracing Harmony)

The pattern portrays Laozi, Confucius and Sakyamuni sitting on natural mountain rocks and wooden platforms amid mountains and forests, engaging in philosophical discussion. It also draws on *Records of the Origin of Yiluo School* by Zhu Xi of the Song Dynasty: 'Master Mingdao sat all day like a clay sculpture, yet treated all people with complete amiability and harmony.'

The most representative version was created by a Ming-dynasty painter, who ingeniously combined a Confucian scholar, a Buddhist monk and a Taoist priest to form the *Harmonious Unity* pattern. It symbolizes that all schools derive from one origin, all doctrines belong to one school, the three religions merge into one, and all hundred schools share the same rationale, reflecting the ideological pursuit of cultural integration and harmonious coexistence.

Visually, the pattern resembles a cross-legged Maitreya Buddha with a beaming, carefree countenance, hands folded in salute. On the left, a Taoist priest leans close to Maitreya's cheek, holding sutra scrolls with a rounded back and hair bound by a spherical ornament; on the right, a Confucian scholar in traditional square headwear holds Confucian clas-



Fig.6-1 The prototype of this line drawing derives from *Harmonious Unity*, painted by Emperor Xianzong of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Jianshen (reigned 1465 – 1487 AD). Though appearing as a single figure in the painting, it actually depicts the representative figures of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism embracing one another. With a rounded and integrated composition, it symbolizes the confluence of the three religions and harmonious coexistence.



Fig.6-2 Colored Painting of the Qing Dynasty: *Sages of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism Discussing Doctrines Together*

sics. The three figures blend seamlessly into an interdependent, harmonious whole. Viewed from left, center and right respectively, the images of Confucius, Sakyamuni and Laozi can be seen, embodying the *Unity of Three Sages*. Inscriptions on the stele praise: ‘Buddhism for spiritual enlightenment, Taoism for physical preservation, Confucianism for ethical clarification’ and ‘Three religions as one, nine schools from a single source’.

Another common motif depicts Confucius, Sakyamuni and Laozi sitting together to discuss scriptures amid wilderness gardens, sturdy pine trees or under the Bodhi tree. It conveys the lesson that people should learn spiritual cultivation from Buddhism, physical refinement from Taoism, and worldly wisdom from Confucianism.

## 7.Wang Yangming Themed Patterns

Wang Yangming (1472, Chenghua 8th year of the Ming Dynasty) was born in Yuyao, Zhejiang Province. A rare statesman, strategist and thinker proficient in both literary and military arts in Chinese history, he achieved illustrious feats and established a distinctive philosophical system.

As a great master of the School of Mind, Wang Yangming advocated *the unity of knowledge and action*, holding that establishing doctrines, accomplishing meritorious deeds and cultivating moral integrity are all forms of spiritual practice. He was the ultimate synthesizer of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Leading a life of hardships and tribulations, he upheld virtue and righteousness, possessing both literary grace and military strategy with extraordinary achievements. His School of Mind exerted far-reaching influence, earning him the accolades ‘Equal to Confucius, Mencius and Zhu Xi’ and ‘Master of a Hundred Generations’. He is acclaimed for attaining the pinnacle in cultivating virtue, accomplishing merits, and establishing teachings. The core tenets of his philosophy — *Mind is Principle, Extending Innate Knowledge, and Unity of Knowledge and Action* — are renowned nationwide.



Fig.7-1 Colored Painting of the Qing Dynasty: *Wang Yangming Lecturing in the Mountains, Combined Patterns of Eight Buddhist Treasures and Eight Taoist Treasures*

Wang Yangming themed patterns are widely applied in folk residences: full texts of the *Heart Sutra* or inscriptions of his core philosophies adorn central screen walls, studies and halls, as well as large folding screens and shrines. Other depictions show him cultivating himself amid mountains, forests, bamboo, streams and peaks, wearing a square pacification headscarf and a wide-sleeved jade-patterned robe; sitting cross-legged in plain robes with the *Heart Sutra* resting on his lap; enlightening himself in a cave inscribed with ‘Unity of Knowledge and Action’ on the wall; sitting alone by mountain streams as depicted in *Moon Meditation Painting*; drafting *Instructions for Practical Living* in formal Confucian court attire; dressed as a Ming court official with red outer robes and a ceremonial tablet in hand; or commanding warships to suppress bandits and secure national stability.

These patterns deliver profound lessons: a narrow mind is the root of misfortune, while an open heart is the gateway to blessing; unhappiness stems from neglecting one’s inner self. They encourage people to open their hearts, uphold the values of mutual assistance, love, respect, harmony and unity, adhere to the core principle of *the unity of knowledge and action*, and pursue self-perfection.

Also known as *Eight Treasures Celebrating Eternal Spring*. The pattern features an alternating arrangement of the Eight Buddhist Symbols — the Dharma Wheel, Conch, Precious Umbrella, Canopy, Lotus, Treasure Vase, Golden Fish and Endless Knot — and the Eight Taoist Treasures: Fisherman’s Drum, Sword, Ruyi Scepter, Coin Pattern Bamboo Basket,

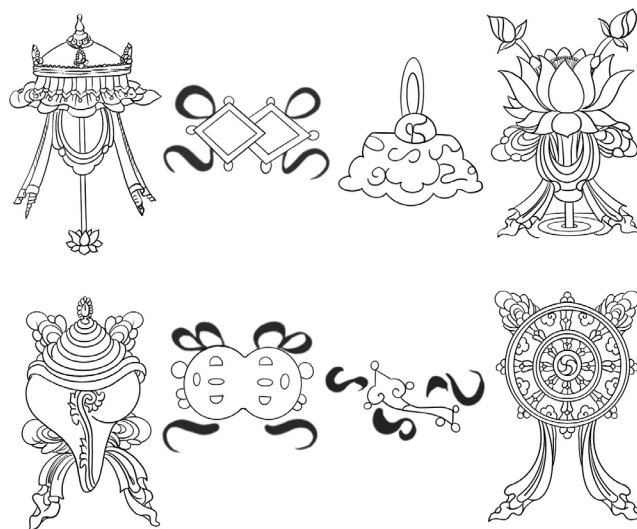


Fig.7-2 Qing Dynasty Pattern: Combined Ritual Implements of Buddhism and Taoism

Gourd, Double Happiness Ornament, Yin-Yang Plaque and Flute.

Centered on either Buddhist or Taoist Eight Treasures, the composition is surrounded by seasonal flowers. The pattern implies an eternal spring for both Buddhism and Taoism throughout the year, symbolizing vitality, perpetual hope, continuous auspiciousness, freedom from illness and disaster, blessings for the whole family, and universal prosperity.

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# Buddhist Patterns in Chinese Traditional Residences

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The introduction of Buddhism into Chinese territory was a gradual process of infiltration, and the academic circle generally recognizes two core nodes: the informal dissemination at the folk level started in the first year of Yuanshou during the reign of Emperor Ai of the Western Han Dynasty (2 BCE). According to the annotation of Pei Songzhi in *Records of the Three Kingdoms·Book of Wei*, which quotes Weilue·Biography of the Western Rong, Yi Cun, an envoy of the King of Dayuezhi (a powerful nomadic tribe in Central Asia at that time), orally taught the *Sutra of Buddhism* to Jing Lu, a disciple of a doctor in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE, a unified feudal dynasty in ancient Chinese history). This is the earliest verifiable record of Buddhism's introduction in official history. The official formal introduction was marked by the *Yongping Pilgrimage for Dharma* in the tenth year of Yongping during the reign of Emperor Ming of the Eastern Han Dynasty (67 CE). Emperor Ming sent envoys to the Western Regions (the area west of the Yumen Pass in ancient China, an important part of the Silk Road) to invite two eminent monks, Kashyapa Matanga and Dharmaratna, back to China. The next year, he ordered the construction of the White Horse Temple, where the *Sutra of Forty-Two Chapters* was translated. This marked that Buddhism was officially recognized by the Chinese Central Plains dynasty and began its systematic dissemination.

The popularization of Buddhism among Chinese people did not happen overnight. After the initial foundation laid during the Han and Wei dynasties (206 BCE – 265 CE), it entered a stage of rapid infiltration during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties (220 CE – 589 CE), and achieved full popularization in the Sui and Tang dynasties (581 CE – 907 CE). During the Han and Wei dynasties, Buddhism mostly attached itself to Huang-Lao thought (a philosophical school combining Chinese Taoism and Yin-Yang theory) and immortality techniques, and its dissemination was limited to the upper nobility and literati. During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, social unrest intensified the Chinese people's crisis of faith. The core ideas of Buddhism, such as 'retribution for good and evil' and 'reincarnation', filled the spiritual void of the people. Coupled with the strong support of Chinese rulers, the prosperity of scripture translation and

the promotion of the movement of seeking Dharma in the Western Regions, Buddhism gradually broke away from the attachment to immortality techniques and penetrated into Chinese folk society. The number of monks and nuns increased sharply, and the temple economy developed rapidly, laying the foundation for its popularization among the Chinese people. In the Sui and Tang dynasties, Buddhism completed its Chinese localization transformation and formed native sects such as *Tiantai Sect*, *Zen Sect* and *Pure Land Sect*. Among them, the simple methods of Zen Sect ('transmitting outside the scriptures, not relying on words') and Pure Land Sect ('reborn in the Pure Land by reciting Buddha's name') greatly lowered the threshold of belief, promoting Buddhism to penetrate into all social strata and become one of the mainstream Chinese folk beliefs.

For the illiterate ordinary Chinese people, the reason why Buddhism could break through the language barrier to achieve widespread dissemination and attract them to become believers lies in its adaptive transformation from 'elite liberation' to 'saving all sentient beings', and the construction of a dissemination system that conforms to the cognition and needs of grassroots Chinese people. Firstly, the popularization of doctrines: Mahayana Buddhism abandoned the harsh practice paradigm of early Buddhism, transformed profound core concepts such as 'Nirvana' and 'Emptiness' into practical demands understandable to Chinese people, such as 'good deeds will be rewarded and evil deeds will be punished' and 'eliminating disasters and avoiding misfortunes'. Through miraculous legends and oral preaching, illiterate Chinese people could understand the core connotation of faith without studying Buddhist scriptures, turning Buddhism into a spiritual carrier for entrusting practical wishes. Secondly, the shaping of deified images: Mahayana Buddhism deified the Buddha from an 'enlightened one' into a protector with infinite supernatural powers, and abstracted Bodhisattvas from 'practitioners' into omnipotent gods with clear divisions of labor. For example, Guanyin Bodhisattva (Avalokiteshvara) is in charge of relieving suffering, Manjushri Bodhisattva (Manjusri) is in charge of wisdom, and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva is in charge of saving beings in hell. These almost cover all kinds of practical needs in Chinese folk life. People only need

to worship sincerely to pray for specific blessings ‘targeted’, without complex theoretical study. Thirdly, the promotion of simple practice methods: the extremely simple practice paths such as ‘Buddha Recitation Method’ allowed illiterate Chinese people who had no time for practice to obtain psychological comfort of ‘external salvation’ only by reciting Buddha’s name, which greatly lowered the threshold of belief and was in line with the living scenes and spiritual needs of grassroots Chinese people.

In the context of being unable to express their faith by studying Buddhist scriptures, illiterate ordinary Chinese people took Buddhist patterns as a concrete carrier of faith expression and prayer for blessings. By decorating various Buddhist patterns on key parts of Chinese residential buildings such as doors, windows, beams, columns, walls, wood carvings and brick carvings, they realized their prayers for peace and happiness, which is also an important embodiment of the folklorization and daily life of Buddhism in China. These patterns are centered on Buddhist figures, dharma instruments and symbols, and each pattern carries a clear connotation of praying for blessings, becoming a silent expression of faith for the Chinese people. Among the Buddhist figure patterns, Sakyamuni (the founder of Buddhism) symbolizes the highest wisdom and compassion; Dharma (Bodhidharma) implies warding off evil spirits and disasters, and perseverance; Guanyin Bodhisattva represents relieving suffering and peace; Maitreya Bodhisattva symbolizes openness, tolerance and longevity; the Four Heavenly Kings and the Eighteen Arhats imply protecting the family and eliminating evil spirits. The essence of decorating these patterns is that Chinese people entrust their protection demands to specific Buddhist images, realizing the visual expression of faith. Among the Buddhist dharma instrument and symbol patterns, the Eight Auspicious Symbols (Eight Buddhist Emblems) centered on *Dharma Wheel*, *Conch*, *Precious Umbrella*, *White Canopy*, *Lotus*, *Precious Vase*, *Goldfish* and *Endless Knot* each carry connotations such as perfect salvation, fame and reputation, protection and health, and purity. The Swastika pattern symbolizes boundless virtue and auspiciousness, and longevity. These patterns transform abstract prayers into perceptible spatial decorations through simple visual symbols, conveying the connotation of faith and good expectations without text interpretation. Through such decoration practices, Chinese people not only expressed their own faith, but also hoped to rely on the sacred connotation carried by Buddhist patterns to protect the peace of their homes, the health of their families and the smoothness of their careers, realizing the ultimate pursuit of a peaceful and happy life. At the same time, they also promoted the in-depth integration of Buddhist culture and Chinese folk residential decoration art.

1.Sakyamuni Pattern: Sakyamuni (563 BCE – 483 BCE), an ancient Indian thinker, educator and religious reformer, was the founder of Buddhism. His name means ‘benevolent, tolerant, calm and caring for all beings’. He represents a pure,

equal and enlightened mind, and symbolizes the supreme wisdom and compassion.



Fig.1 Colored painting of the late Tang Dynasty (618 CE – 907 CE): Sakyamuni sitting in cross-legged posture.

2.Dharma Pattern: Dharma (Bodhidharma, late 5th century – early 6th century), the first patriarch of Chinese Zen Buddhism. Legend has it that Dharma meditated facing the wall in Shaolin Temple in Henan Province of China for nine years. Common patterns include Dharma crossing the river on a reed, Dharma crossing the sea, and Dharma meditating facing the wall. Dharma had a clear mind, was free from desires, and saw through the world of mortals. He intended to eliminate all troubles, ensure smooth life and comfortable living; he could also resist all disasters and sufferings, implying turning danger into safety and warding off evil spirits and disasters. He is also a symbol of academic achievement, profound knowledge, ultimate enlightenment and spiritual perfection. In the picture: Dharma crosses the river on a reed in the river and sea. This pattern admonishes Chinese people that courage in the face of difficulties, perseverance and consistency are the guarantee of career success.

3.Guanyin Bodhisattva Pattern: *Book of Northern Qi* written by Li Baiyao in the Tang Dynasty records: ‘He said that he first saw a colorful object in the sky, which gradually approached and turned into a beautiful woman, standing several zhang (a traditional Chinese unit of length, about 3.3 meters) above the ground. After a meal, it turned into Guanyin.’ During the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420 CE – 589 CE), Guanyin had both male and female characteristics; before the Song Dynasty (960 CE – 1279 CE), Guanyin was mostly male, and gradually turned into female in the Southern





Fig.2 Pattern of the Qing Dynasty (1636 CE – 1912 CE): Dharma crossing the sea on a raft in rough waves.

Song Dynasty (1127 CE – 1279 CE). Guanyin has a gentle temperament, dignified demeanor, clear understanding of the world, and is the embodiment of relieving suffering, eliminating disasters, avoiding misfortunes, great compassion and saving all sentient beings. In the picture: Guanyin crossing the sea, with isolated coasts and several green peaks, like Putuo Mountain (one of the four famous Buddhist mountains in China) lying like a dragon in the sea, where Guanyin is located; or Guanyin holding a pure bottle and standing on a lotus flower. Different shapes of Guanyin have different meanings: Guanyin with a dragon head decoration on the head implies eliminating harm for the people, protecting people, living and working in peace and contentment, and the safety and health of descendants; Guanyin holding willow branches and a pure bottle symbolizes nectar sprinkling on the world, implying good weather and bumper harvests; Guanyin lying on a lotus leaf implies peaceful sleep, physical and mental health, and keeping a peaceful mind; Guanyin lying on a lotus leaf or lotus throne implies extraordinary bearing, generosity, responsiveness to prayers and success in all matters; Guanyin holding Buddhist scriptures implies the fulfillment of wishes, the

completion of great achievements and success in examinations; Guanyin with a circular holy light on the back implies perfect thought, calmness and steadfastness; Guanyin sitting or playing on colorful auspicious clouds (a symbol of good luck in Chinese culture) implies rolling financial resources and prosperous business; Guanyin sitting cross-handed on a rock with a blazing flame halo behind has the function of subduing disasters and fire, relieving all internal and external sufferings of sentient beings and releasing their inner troubles; Guanyin holding a lotus flower, standing or sitting on a lotus leaf, or holding a lotus flower in both hands, indicates a pure and holy spirit; Guanyin of Sending Children, also known as Guanyin of Sending Children in White Robe, is an incarnation of Guanyin created by the Chinese people, indicating that Guanyin can meet all kinds of good wishes of sentient beings, bless them to have children if they pray, and relieve their sufferings; Guanyin with the right leg squatting, the left foot



Fig.3 Colored painting of the Tang Dynasty: Guanyin walking calmly in rough waves.

stepping lightly on a lotus leaf, and the left hand supporting the whole body, sitting freely on a Sumeru throne (a Buddhist sacred throne), is a symbol of profound wisdom.

The *Thousand-Armed and Thousand-Eyed Guanyin* has 'thousand arms' representing boundlessness and perfection, metaphorizing the boundless great compassion, and 'thousand eyes' representing the perfect wisdom without obstacles. It can also benefit and comfort all sentient beings, silently protect Chinese people through various difficulties, eliminate all diseases, make people more brilliant when luck is good, and eliminate all obstacles and disasters when luck is low, helping people get through difficulties smoothly and achieve a happy and auspicious life. The Chinese pronunciation of 'Guanyin' is the same as that of 'official seal', implying smooth work, successful career, prosperous official fortune and steady progress.

**4.Manjushri Bodhisattva Pattern:** Manjushri Bodhisattva (Manjusri), the leader of all Bodhisattvas, symbolizes wisdom. He is regarded as the son of Sakyamuni Buddha, the 'Dharma King', and the left attendant of Sakyamuni Buddha. He wears a precious crown, has five buns on his head, wears Bodhisattva robes, holds a sword in his hand, and rides a majestic lion, combining longevity, sharp wisdom and powerful wisdom. In the picture: with Wutai Mountain (one of the four famous Buddhist mountains in China, known as 'five peaks covered by clouds all year round') as the background, Manjushri holds a sword, carries a long-handled Ruyi (a traditional Chinese auspicious object symbolizing good luck), or holds a vajra sword in his right hand and a green lotus flower in his left hand, with a *Prajna Sutra* box on the flower, riding a green-faced lion. He is the embodiment of clever and perfect wisdom, a messenger of justice and compassion. Manjushri Bodhisattva can increase blessings, enhance memory, eliminate ignorance and clarify the true nature of all things. He symbolizes justice, courage, wisdom, outstanding literary talent and successful career, and is also a symbol of kindness and love.

**5.Samantabhadra Bodhisattva Pattern:** Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, the right attendant of Sakyamuni Buddha, contains the meanings of compassion, filial piety and wisdom. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva practices what he preaches, advising Chinese people to achieve real success, not to be empty-minded, but to do everything in person, becoming the embodiment of 'truth comes from practice'. In the picture: with Emei Mountain (one of the four famous Buddhist mountains in China, known as 'higher than the five great mountains and the most beautiful in China') as the background, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva wears a five-Buddha crown, golden Bodhisattva robes, makes a wish-granting seal with his left hand, holds a sword in his right hand, and sits half-cross-legged on a six-tusk white elephant. Samantabhadra either sits on the elephant's back or appears in the world as a child immortal, implying protecting the peace of the world, fulfilling Chinese



Fig.4 Colored painting of the Northern Song Dynasty (960 CE – 1127 CE): Manjushri traveling around the world on a green lion.



Fig.5 Colored painting of the Ming Dynasty (1368 CE – 1644 CE): Samantabhadra sitting on an elephant's back and carefully reading Buddhist scriptures.

people's wishes, bringing happiness and unexpected gains, and at the same time eliminating villains and avoiding disasters and evils. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is the natal Buddha of people born in the Year of the Dragon and the Year of



the Snake (Chinese zodiac signs, which are an important part of traditional Chinese culture), so it is not excluded that some Chinese residential owners specially decorate Samantabhadra Bodhisattva according to their zodiac signs.

**6.Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Pattern:** Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva is named because he is 'as calm and steadfast as the earth, and as deep and secret as a treasure'. His great vow of 'If I do not enter hell, who will enter hell? Until hell is empty, I will not become a Buddha!' is worshipped by Chinese people. *Sutra of Sumeru* records that Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva is a Bodhisattva who makes sentient beings have sufficient food and clothing, peace of body and mind, and saves them from all sufferings. In the picture: with the background of patterns implying 'thin and cold as cut in the air, clear and green light reflecting in the water', Ksitigarbha has a shaven head, kind eyes, a loving expression, holds a tin staff in his right hand and a mani pearl (a Buddhist sacred pearl symbolizing light and wisdom) in his left hand, looking like he is traveling around the world to save predestined sentient beings; or he wears a gauze hat, decorated with a few pearls, holds a mani pearl in one hand, and sits comfortably on the altar with a wish-granting seal, preaching seal or earth-pointing seal in the other hand.

**7.Maitreya Bodhisattva Pattern:** Commonly known as the Laughing Buddha with a Big Belly. *Biographies of Eminent Monks in the Song Dynasty* records: 'This monk's Dharma name is Qici. He was not good-looking, with a frowning forehead and a big belly, and his words were unpredictable. He slept everywhere, often carrying a cloth bag on his Zen staff, entering and leaving the market, begging for everything he saw and putting it into the bag, known as the Cloth Bag Monk of Changting.' Before the Tang Dynasty, Maitreya had two image types: Bodhisattva and Tathagata. He wore Bodhisattva robes, had a long face, never smiled, and sat cross-legged. His shape was similar to that of Sakyamuni Buddha, both with spiral hair, but Sakyamuni had a usnisa (a protuberance on the top of the head symbolizing Buddha's wisdom) on his head, while Maitreya did not. During the Five Dynasties (907 CE – 960 CE), Maitreya appeared with a big belly and a smiling face. The Maitreya Buddha statue at Feilai Peak in Hangzhou of China in the Song Dynasty had a bald head, a big face, drooping eyes, a big smile, big ears hanging down to the shoulders, a bare chest and a big belly, wearing a cassock, pressing and protecting a big cloth bag with his left hand and holding a string of Buddhist beads with his right hand, known as the Cloth Bag Monk. This image of Maitreya has been used in Chinese residential decorations until now. Maitreya Buddha is compassionate, saves others and himself, tolerant, modest, kind-hearted and indifferent to fame and fortune. He symbolizes the tolerance, wisdom, humor and happiness of the Chinese nation, bringing Chinese people blessings, health, boundless longevity and continuous good luck, embodying Chinese people's good wishes for the future life. Maitreya has strong positive energy, which is a magic weapon to eliminate disasters and diseases, relieve worries and ensure people's



Fig.6 Wood carving of the Qing Dynasty: Ksitigarbha standing firmly on a lotus throne holding a tin staff.



Fig.7 Wood carving of the Qing Dynasty: Maitreya sitting on a flower table holding Buddhist beads and a cloth belt.

peace.

Maitreya is compassionate, always smiling, humorous, intelligent, kind to others, optimistic and tolerant, unrestrained, patient, treats people with harmony, welcomes guests from all directions, and can tolerate the intolerable things in the world, so he is deeply respected and loved by Chinese people. In the picture: the round-shaped Maitreya, with a big smile and high spirits, implies harmony, cheerfulness, physical and mental health, long life, no worries and happy events; or the baby-faced Maitreya, commonly known as the Baby Buddha by the Chinese people, reflecting a Zen mind, a simple heart to face the complex world; or 'Five Boys Playing with



Maitreya', with five boys playing around Maitreya, implying family joy or 'Five Sons Passing the Imperial Examination' (a traditional Chinese idiom meaning that all children achieve success in their studies); or combined with antique patterns, Maitreya sits on a couch, holding a bag in one hand and Buddhist beads in the other, with vases, flowers, books and other objects beside him, implying blessings, luck, harmony, joy and spiritual enlightenment; or Maitreya riding a lion, holding a gourd (a symbol of health and longevity in Chinese culture) tightly in his right hand, with cranes (a symbol of longevity) in the sky behind him, broken pomegranates (a symbol of more children and more blessings) and peach of immortality (a symbol of longevity) at his feet, the overall meaning is that the family is wealthy from generation to generation, with numerous descendants and longevity. The money bag in Maitreya's hand is a 'wisdom bag' and 'treasure bag', which gathers luck, aura and wealth from all directions, helping Chinese people to be smooth and prosperous.

8.Four Heavenly Kings Pattern: The patterns of the Four Heavenly Kings, the Dharma protectors of Buddhism, are mostly decorated on the beams and columns of the first hall of Chinese residential buildings, or on the murals of the gable walls of the ritual hall, intending to pray for the protection of the family by the Dharma of the Heavenly Kings. During the Five Dynasties, they were commonly known as the Four Vajras by the Chinese people; in the Ming Dynasty, *Investiture of the Gods* (a famous traditional Chinese novel) evolved them into the four Mo brothers and four divine generals. In

the picture: under the willow tree, the 'Eastern Heavenly King of Protecting the Country' wears armor, stares angrily, and holds a pipa (a traditional Chinese musical instrument); under the ginkgo tree, the 'Southern Heavenly King of Growth' looks into the distance, holding a sword in his right



Fig.8-2 Wood carving of the Qing Dynasty: Holding a sword high in the right hand and a treasure ring in the left hand to practice Dharma.

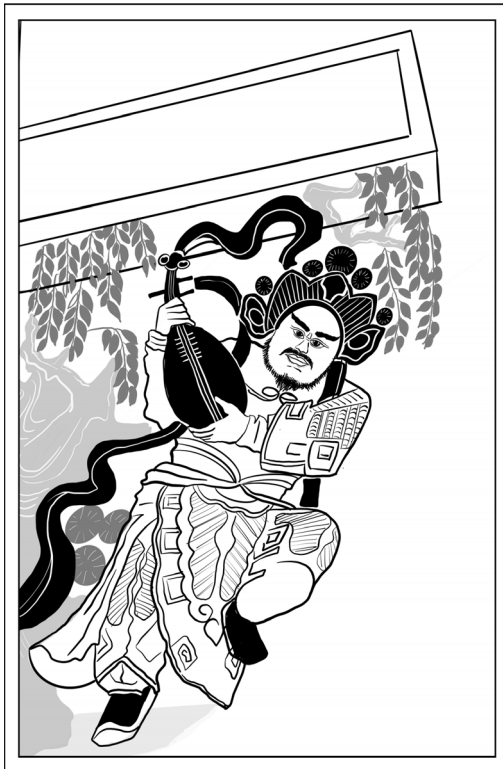


Fig.8-1 Wood carving of the Qing Dynasty: Holding a ribbon pipa to practice Dharma with both hands.



Fig.8-3 Wood carving of the Qing Dynasty: Holding a long snake in the right hand and a pearl tightly in the left hand to practice Dharma.



Fig.8-4 Wood carving of the Qing Dynasty: Spreading five fingers to the sky with the right hand and holding a treasure umbrella tightly in the left hand to practice Dharma.

hand and a jade ring in his left hand; under the pine tree, the 'Western Heavenly King of Wide Eyes' stares closely ahead, holding a snake in his right hand and a pearl in his left hand; under the osmanthus tree, the 'Northern Heavenly King of Wealth and Fame' smiles, opens his right hand and waves an umbrella in his left hand. This pattern represents good weather, spring growth, autumn harvest, winter storage and peace all year round. The pipa, a Dharma instrument, will lose its sound if the strings are too loose or break if the strings are too tight, admonishing Chinese people to behave in a moderate way and maintain harmony in everything; the sword implies diligent study and practice, improving one's morality, knowledge, wisdom, talent and ability to achieve perfection; the snake represents that people and things develop in change, and only by understanding the true meaning of things can we deal with them freely; the umbrella represents the unity of knowledge and action, containing the meaning of 'reading ten thousand books and traveling ten thousand miles', and only by putting what we have learned into practice can we make our career and family business perfect.

9.Eighteen Arhats Pattern: The ancient Chinese people had a special preference for the number 'eighteen', such as 'eighteen generations', 'eighteen marquises', 'eighteen scholars' and 'eighteen martial arts'. Among them, the Buddhist and Taoist, secularized Eighteen Arhats patterns are mostly decorated on the hall doors of Chinese residential buildings or the gable walls of the ritual hall. In the picture: under the clouds and

dragons (symbols of imperial power and good luck in Chinese culture), the Eighteen Arhats gather together: the Arhat Subduing the Tiger, holding a golden ring high and riding on the back of a tiger, is full of strength and wisdom, fearless of difficulties and obstacles; the Long-Eyebrowed Arhat implies insight into the world, kindness and boundless longevity; the Arhat Holding a Ruyi high represents wisdom and meditation, bringing eternal good luck to Chinese people; the Arhat Holding a Bowl intends to beg for food to help people and care for all sentient beings; the Happy Arhat shaking a treasure fan represents purity and freedom from worries; the Arhat Holding a Book implies extensive reading and profound knowledge; the Arhat Holding a Buddhist Scripture represents inheriting and carrying forward the classics; the Arhat Leaning on a Tin Staff represents correct practice and solving doubts; the Arhat Holding a Precious Pearl symbolizes wisdom and wealth; the Arhat Holding a Fly Whisk represents dispelling worries; the Arhat Holding a Dragon-Subduing Staff symbolizes the power to subdue evil; the Deer-Sitting Arhat holding deer antlers represents encouraging learning and practice; the Pagoda-Holding Arhat represents protecting Buddhism; the Happy Arhat holding a treasure fan represents happiness; the Arm-Raising Arhat holding a Ruyi symbolizes good luck; the Arhat Holding a Child implies the endless inheritance of Buddhism and unchanging care for the world; the Free-Spirited Arhat holding a gourd symbolizes spreading blessings and prosperity all over the world; the Cloth Bag Arhat holding a bag symbolizes tolerating all things; the Arhat Holding a Bell admonishes Chinese people to stay alert, behave wisely and not be disturbed by external troubles. Decorating these patterns in Chinese residential buildings is intended to encourage family harmony, brotherhood, sincere cooperation, eliminate all worries, resist all difficulties, live a simple and happy life, and make students confident and strong, concentrate on



Fig.9 Colored painting of the Qing Dynasty: Eighteen Arhats.



self-cultivation, have outstanding abilities, obtain high official positions and generous salaries, live a peaceful life, and have a successful career. In addition, it also protects the family from danger and subdues evil spirits.

**10.Hehe Two Immortals Pattern:** Hehe Two Immortals were famous monks in the Tang Dynasty of China, named Hanshan and Shide. The ancient Chinese people regarded them as gods of blessing and love, symbolizing happy marriage, family harmony and reunion. The reason why the ancient Chinese people loved ‘harmony’ (He) and ‘unity’ (He) comes from Mencius’ (a famous ancient Chinese philosopher) saying: ‘Opportunities of time are not as good as advantages of situation, and advantages of situation are not as good as harmony among people.’ It also tells Chinese rulers that only by governing the country with benevolence can the world be stable; it admonishes Chinese people that only by harmony between people can society and families be stable; ‘When people are of one mind, they can move mountains’, and everything can

be successfully completed. They are the gods of marriage and popularity, the ‘gods of love’ symbolizing friendship, and the embodiment of harmony in marriage, filial piety and fraternity in Chinese folk culture.

In the picture: Hehe Two Immortals are always smiling, with square faces, big ears, childlike faces and fat bodies, stepping on auspicious clouds, with a fairy-like demeanor. Hanshan has a childish look, wears a loose red robe over his shoulders, bares his chest and back, has disheveled hair, and holds lotus flowers, lotus leaves, or fairy grass, orchids, or lilies high in his hands; Shide has two ball-shaped flower boy knots on his head, wears colored ribbons around his body, holds a round box in his left hand and opens the box cover with his right hand. Inside the box are auspicious fruits such as pomegranates, longans, Buddha’s hands (a fruit symbolizing blessing) and peaches of immortality, and several bats (a symbol of blessing in Chinese culture, whose pronunciation is the same as that of ‘blessing’) are rising in the fairy air. This pattern symbolizes the harmony of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism (the three major traditional cultures in China), reflects the Chinese Confucian ethics of loyalty, filial piety, integrity and righteousness, and sacrificing one’s life for righteousness, and also contains the belief in the Three Stars of Blessing, Emoluments and Longevity, and the Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues (the core of Chinese Confucian ethics). Sometimes they are depicted as elderly people with fairy-like demeanor, traveling through wind and rain, combined with Taoist priests refining elixirs in deep mountains and old forests of China, to reflect the harmonious response between man and nature. The combination of Hanshan, Shide, Liuhai and Tieguai Li (two famous immortals in Chinese Taoism) symbolizes four joys and four immortals blessing longevity. Among them, the elixir in Tieguai Li’s gourd can cure all diseases and make people live forever; Liuhai brings financial fortune and longevity; or Hanshan carries a huge lotus flower on his shoulder, Shide rides on a deer (a symbol of longevity in Chinese culture) with a Ruyi in its mouth, holds a box in his right hand, and auspicious clouds drift out of the box, with a phoenix (a symbol of prosperity and auspiciousness in Chinese culture) turning back and spreading its wings



Fig.10 Wood carving of the Qing Dynasty: Hehe Two Immortals dancing between heaven and earth.



Fig.11 Brick carving of the Tang Dynasty: Feitian holding honeysuckle branches.



in the clouds, symbolizing wealth, harmony, blessing and emoluments.

11. Feitian (Flying Apsara) Pattern: Feitian, also known as 'Heavenly Music God', 'Music God' and 'Flying God', is one of the 'Eight Heavenly Dragons' in Buddhism. It comes from Buddhist scriptures, with the Sanskrit names 'Gandharva' and 'Gandharva'; also known as 'Fragrance Sound God' or 'Fragrance Shade God', which means 'not eating meat and wine, only smelling fragrance'. It is a rare auspicious pattern in Chinese residential buildings. In the picture: Feitian flies in the sky, holds musical instruments and dances gracefully, symbolizing joy and auspiciousness.

12. Sudhana Boy Pattern: Sudhana Boy is a boy who faithfully guards Guanyin Bodhisattva. He does not value the throne, does not covet wealth and treasures, does not seek fame and fortune, and focuses on physical and mental purity, which is loved by Chinese people. In the picture: Sudhana kneels down to worship an elder selling incense, and on the antique shelf in the hall are displayed furnishings such as stoves,



Fig.12 Colored painting of the Ming Dynasty: Sudhana Boy worshipping Guanyin with his hands clasped.

tripods, mortars, knives, saws, axes, and incense utensils. It implies that incense can help Chinese people perceive the mystery of the sense of smell, develop their own wisdom and cultivate the virtue of a gentleman. It also means that Sudhana Boy brings blessings to the Chinese world and brings happy events that benefit all sentient beings.

13. Buddhist Dharma Instrument Pattern: Also known as the Eight Auspicious Symbols Pattern or Eight Buddhist Emblems, it is a unique Dharma instrument symbol of Buddhism,

consisting of *Dharma Wheel*, *Conch*, *Precious Umbrella*, *White Canopy*, *Lotus*, *Precious Vase*, *Goldfish* and *Endless Knot*.

① Dharma Wheel: Also known as the Golden Wheel. The round Dharma Wheel represents perfection, consisting of hub, spoke, rim and edge. The hub represents precepts, and the eight spokes represent the right path. It contains the meanings of breaking through, rolling forward, perfection and unceasingly saving all sentient beings. The center of the wheel is decorated with a lotus throne with sixteen lotus petals or lotus petal patterns, and a swastika pattern is pasted on it, symbolizing the ability to quickly grasp the key to success. It wishes Chinese families continuous good luck, perfection, long and smooth career.

② Conch: There are left-handed and right-handed conchs. The spiral direction of conchs is related to sea waves and sunlight; most are left-handed, and right-handed ones are very rare, so they are very precious. The right-handed conch, also known as the Dharma conch, is said by the Buddha to have the wonderful sound of Bodhisattva fruit and auspiciousness; the right-handed white conch represents the three neck lines of the Buddha, symbolizing that the sound shakes all directions. The sound blown by the conch can spread to a very far place, representing fame and bringing Chinese people a good reputation. The right-handed white conch is the most respected, regarded as a symbol of fame spreading all over the three worlds, and the Dharma sound that saves all sentient beings endlessly from generation to generation.

③ Precious Umbrella: Also known as the Canopy, it is a flat-top cylindrical umbrella covering the Buddha statue, with different textures, such as silk, wood or metal. The Precious Umbrella evolved from the dust-proof umbrella used by ancient Chinese kings when traveling. As a solemn ornament of the Buddha, its meaning is 'where the Buddha goes, I go; where the Buddha stays, I stay'. It protects all sentient beings from temptation and helps them overcome fear. It represents that 'Buddhism operates and spreads freely and unimpededly'. Its ability to open and close freely means that it covers Chinese people harmoniously and is a symbol of protecting all sentient beings.

④ White Canopy: Also known as the Victory Banner, it is cylindrical and cannot be opened or closed like an umbrella. It often appears in the patterns of processions of great men, top scholars (the first place in the imperial examination of ancient China) and carriages. It symbolizes eliminating all troubles and demons, implying success in every battle and complete victory; it can protect all sentient beings from troubles, pains and obstacles in reincarnation.

⑤ Lotus: Represents the Buddha's tongue, with the charm of good luck and good fortune. The lotus symbolizes purity and holiness, representing a pure mind; it also symbolizes treating others with a kind and pure heart, and winning the apprecia-

tion, respect and love of others with natural inner beauty in Chinese interpersonal communication.

⑥ Precious Vase: It is a treasure that is perfect in blessing and wisdom, symbolizing the achievement of success. There are peacock feathers and Ruyi trees inserted in the vase, which symbolize auspiciousness, gathering wealth without leakage, perfect blessing and wisdom, and eternal life; the Ruyi tree in the Precious Vase symbolizes purity, financial fortune, boundless blessings and longevity for Chinese families.

⑦ Goldfish: Also seen as a pair of fish. It represents the Buddha's eyes, looking kindly at all sentient beings, and is a symbol of wisdom. It also symbolizes vitality, health, and the function of warding off evil spirits and attracting good luck in Chinese folk culture. Fish swim freely in the water, implying liberation beyond the world, freedom and openness, and symbolizing freedom, transcendence, wealth and harmony. A pair of male and female goldfish symbolizes liberation, recovery, eternal life and rebirth.

⑧ Endless Knot: Also known as the Auspicious Knot. It is said to have evolved from knot writing, or invented by Fuxi in the late Paleolithic Age or Shennong in the middle Neolithic Age of China. *I Ching·Xici Xia* records: 'In ancient times, people governed by tying knots; later, sages replaced them with writing.' The Endless Knot is a variant rhombus geometric pattern formed by ten straight lines winding and connecting. Its characteristics are no head or tail, no beginning or end, winding and interlocking, unimpeded and continuous. Its appearance is like two swastika patterns intersecting, meaning 'circular and penetrating, all clear'. The headless and tailless knot, shaped like a tray, is also called the 'lucky plate', which can provide Chinese people with continuous good luck, and it is eternal, symbolizing the endless flow of life, the continuity of harmony and happiness, the continuous flow of financial fortune, the long reproduction of descendants, and good luck always surrounding the family, with endless blessings, emoluments accompanying the family from generation to generation. The Chinese pronunciation of 'Chang' (endless) is the same as that of 'Chang' (intestine), implying endless years. The Endless Knot is often combined with peony (a symbol of wealth and nobility in Chinese culture), coins (a symbol of wealth), bats and goldfish, implying 'endless wealth and nobility', the gathering of all things, constant good luck, peace and harmony, and happiness and prosperity. It is also seen that the Endless Knot is combined into the shape of a gourd, implying that the fortune of blessing and emoluments is eternal; it also represents the literacy and virtue of good Chinese women, a good marriage, eternal love and a long life together. Some Endless Knots are combined into a regular seal script character 'Shou' (longevity), implying good health and eternal youth. The Endless Knot has dense sections, interlocking, circular and penetrating, without beginning or end, symbolizing the unity of mind and matter, eternal existence.



Fig.13 Colored painting of the Qing Dynasty: Precious Umbrella, Goldfish, White Canopy, Lotus, Conch, Endless Knot, Precious Vase and Dharma Wheel.



Fig.14 Pattern of the late Ming Dynasty: The combination of the swastika and ganoderma, implying boundless longevity.

It contains the meanings of forming associations, making oaths of brotherhood, and unity, encouraging Chinese people to unite around the family, observe rules, keep promises, and associate with people of high moral character.

14.Swastika Pattern: The Swastika pattern is the trajectory of the Big Dipper rotating once, representing the endless cycle of spring, summer, autumn and winter, and also a symbol of the Buddha's heart shining on the world. It appeared in ancient India, Persia, Greece and other countries about 7,000 years ago, and clear swastika patterns were decorated on Majiayao painted pottery 4,500 years ago (Majiayao culture is an important Neolithic culture in ancient China). During

the Northern Wei Dynasty (386 CE – 534 CE), a Buddhist scripture translated it as the character ‘Wan’ (meaning ten thousand); during the Tang Dynasty, Xuanzang (a famous monk who went to India to seek Dharma from China) and others translated it as ‘De’ (meaning virtue), emphasizing the boundless merit of the Buddha. Buddhism holds that the swastika pattern is an ‘auspicious sign’ appearing on Sakya-muni’s chest, implying boundless virtue and auspiciousness. In the second year of Changshou in the Zhou Dynasty of the Tang Dynasty (693 CE), Wu Zetian (the only female emperor in Chinese history) designated the pronunciation of the

swastika as ‘Wan’, and it was designated as a symbol of the sun and fire, ‘the gathering of all auspiciousness’ and all auspicious merits in the world. In the picture: the combination of the swastika and a tripod (a traditional Chinese ritual vessel symbolizing power and auspiciousness) symbolizes all wishes coming true; the combination with ‘Shou’ (longevity), ‘round Shou’ and ganoderma (a symbol of longevity in Chinese culture) symbolizes boundless longevity. In ancient times, it was used as an auspicious symbol, spell and amulet in Chinese folk customs.

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# Lost Artistic Legacy: Liu Dezhai and the Rise of Watercolor Education at Tou-sè-wè

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**Abstract:** From 1880 to 1912, Liu Dezhai served as director of the Shanghai Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop for thirty-two years, leading it to its most brilliant period. An important educator of early Chinese watercolor, he left behind a body of work that was almost entirely lost or scattered. He inherited Western teaching methods, introduced Pierre Vignal's watercolors, trained Xu Yongqing, and, through contacts with Shanghai-school painters, integrated Western sketching into traditional Chinese painting. Although his watercolors are lost, his contributions to Western art education and the dissemination of watercolor are significant. As a key figure in the rise of Chinese watercolor education, he left a pedagogical legacy and cross-cultural influence that had a lasting and profound impact on Chinese watercolor.

**Keywords:** Liu Dezhai; Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop; watercolor education

In his early years, Liu Dezhai (1843–1912) studied at St. Ignatius Academy (Xuhui Public School) and the Jesuit novitiate, where he was influenced by the rector, Angelo Zottoli (1826–1902), and wrote a novel entitled *The Revenge of the Candle*. In 1867, with Lu Bodu (1836–1880), he entered the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop, where “he first learned Chinese painting, then turned to Western painting, becoming known for his watercolor landscapes”[1] (Zhang Wei, 2017). During this period, he also studied oil painting under Nicolas Massa (1815–1876) and integrated the techniques and aesthetic sensibilities of Chinese ink-wash painting into his Western works. After the Xujiahui Art School moved to Tou-sè-wè in 1872, Liu Dezhai served as the workshop's deputy director, responsible for watercolor instruction. In 1880, he formally took charge of the workshop and remained its head until his death.

During his tenure at the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop, Liu Dezhai placed special emphasis on watercolor teaching. He introduced the watercolor works of the French painter Pierre Vignal (1855–1925) for students to copy, trained Xu Yongqing, later hailed as “the father of Chinese watercolor”, and his art also exerted a positive influence on the Shanghai School of painting. As head of the workshop for thirty-two years, he trained approximately 150 students. He often took his students outdoors to sketch and maintained close contact with Ren Bonian and Ren Xun. Historical sources record that “he frequently took his students to visit Ren Bonian, learning

Chinese painting from him”[2] (Shanghai Library Institute of Historical Documents, 2013). However, almost all of Liu Dezhai's own watercolor works have been dispersed. According to Zhang Hongxing, “In 1911, Liu Dezhai published the novel *The Revenge of the Candle*, and on its frontispiece there was a watercolor print titled *Saint Margarita Receiving Ruiersong into the Convent*”[3] (Zhang Hongxing, 1991). The original painting is untraceable. The loss of Liu Dezhai's watercolor works stands in stark contrast to the crucial role he played in the education and dissemination of early Chinese watercolor painting. It is precisely this paradox (lost works but lasting influence) that drives this study.

## 1. Sino-Western Fusion in Liu Dezhai's Artistic Creation

### 1.1 The Indigenized Translation of Religious Images

Liu Dezhai's oil paintings for Sheshan Marian Basilica (*Our Lady of the Presentation of the Faith*) and for Dongjiadu Church (*Guardian Angel*, *St. Ignatius*, and *St. Anne*) were predominantly copies or imitations, reflecting the tradition of the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop. More noteworthy is his creative work, *Chinese Madonna and Child* (Fig. 1). Scholars still debate the painting's authorship, although most attribute it to Liu Dezhai. The painting was designated as the “Standard



Fig. 1 Chinese Madonna and Child, by Liu Dezhai, late 19th to early 20th centuries.

Chinese Madonna” at the First Chinese Catholic Council for China in 1924 [4] (Liu Ping, 2014). The original is lost; only reproductions remain.

The painting depicts the Madonna, dressed as a Qing-dynasty empress, seated on a Chinese-style chair. In her right hand, she holds a scepter, while on her left lap she cradles the Christ Child, who is dressed in a dragon robe. Both figures wear European-style crowns, and their facial features are Western. The Madonna gazes downward with a solemn and dignified expression, while the Child looks straight ahead with his hands open. Porcelain vases and flowers are positioned on either side of the composition, and behind them, a screen bears the seal-script character *shou* (longevity). The floor is covered with a dragon-patterned carpet, and in the distance, a pagoda, a lake, and mountains are visible. The upper right and upper left corners display the characters *huang* (emperor) and *hou* (empress), respectively. These elements collectively integrate Chinese auspicious culture, court culture, and Christian iconography. The painting employs Western perspective and the principle of “distant void, near solid”, depicting the figures at full length.

Li Chao describes its style as a “flat application of color”, “language of linear modeling”, and “tendency toward planar decoration”[5] (Li Chao, 2004), with the linear being most prominent. Heinrich Wölfflin notes: “The linear style is a style of clear, plastic feeling. The uniform, firm, and clear boundaries of solid objects give the viewer a sense of secu-

rity, as if one could touch those boundaries with one’s own fingers”[6] (Heinrich Wölfflin, 1987). The flat application of color to forms delineated by lines reflects a grasp of objective truth. Overall, the *Chinese Madonna and Child* is not merely a repetition of Western sacred images but a revision and variation of Western sacred art as transplanted into a Chinese context.

## 1.2 Cultural Fusion in Family Instruction Images

The illustrations in *Daoyuan Jingcui* (*The Essence of the Way*) (published by Tou-sè-wè Cimu Press in 1887), as well as those in *Illustrated Explanations of Ancient History* (1892) and *Illustrated Explanations of Modern History* (1894)—both credited to “Drawn by the Painting Studio of Tou-sè-wè Cimu Press”—were produced collectively by Liu Dezhai and his students. Many of these illustrations depict the instruction of women and children. Although *Image of Instructing the Young in Illustrated Explanations of Ancient History* has no signature, Liu Dezhai later revised it multiple times, suggesting it was his work. *Admonishing the Family* at the end of *Illustrated Explanations of Modern History* is a reworking of *Image of Instructing the Young*. It bears the signature and seal of “Liu Bizhen”, along with Liu Dezhai’s Western name “S. Lieou S. J. del” in the lower right corner, and includes an inscription emphasizing the principles of “revering God, fearing sin, knowing the scriptures, and understanding religious doctrine”[7] (Shanghai Library Institute of Historical Documents, 2013). In 1911, Liu Dezhai’s novel *The Revenge of the Candle* (Fig. 2) was published by the Tou-sè-wè Printing

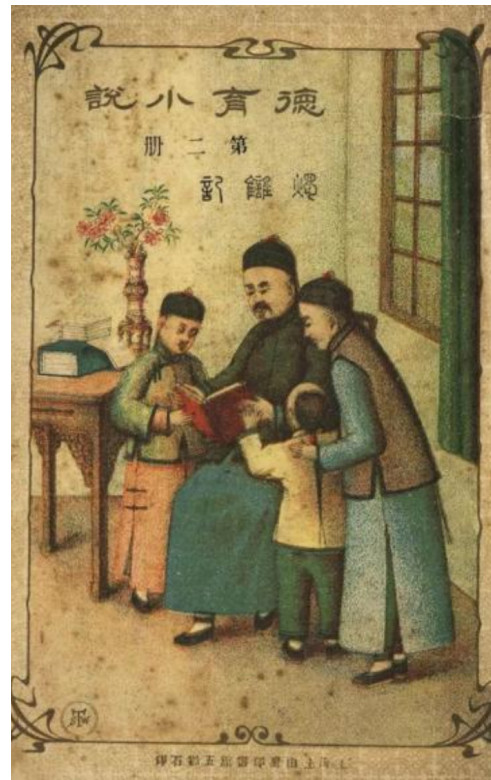


Fig. 2 Cover illustration of *The Revenge of the Candle*, by Liu Dezhai, 1911



House, and its cover displays a five-color chromolithograph by Liu depicting a scene of family instruction.

Liu Dezhai often painted such “family instruction images”, showing his focus on “strict family precepts” and “self-cultivation as the primary virtue”. The tradition of Chinese family instruction has a long history, and in the late Qing and early Republican period, under the influence of Western learning, new variants emerged that incorporated Western ethical concepts. Against this backdrop, Liu Dezhai’s “family instruction images” represent a hybrid approach to Christian imagery. He employed linear drawing techniques and the method of leaving blank space (liubai) to reshape the pictorial context, with Jesus Christ appearing in the background haloed and with open hands, indicating divine presence. The cover of *The Revenge of the Candle*, by contrast, depicts a purely Chinese-style family instruction scene without Catholic elements. Artistically, it abandons linear modeling in favor of light, shadow, and three-dimensional form. The figures are highly simplified and generalized, giving them an archaic and rustic look.

Liu Dezhai’s works achieved a deep integration of Western religious spirit and Chinese tradition in terms of subject matter, style, and cultural concept, manifesting an indigenized consciousness that transformed “Western imagery” into “Chinese expression.” Beginning with the “Liu Dezhai era”, Tou-sè-wè painting broke with the convention of merely copying Western models, thereby laying the foundation for later indigenized creation and the autonomous development of Chinese watercolor art.

## 2.The Inheritance and Expansion of Liu Dezhai’s Pedagogical System

The pedagogical system of the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop dates back to 1852, when the Spanish Jesuit Joannes Ferrer (1817–1856) founded the Xujiahui Art School (L’École des Beaux-Arts) in Shanghai. Later, Faustin Laime (1825–?) introduced the Western model of art education and was acclaimed as “a pioneer of Western art education in China”[8] (Zhang Wei and Zhang Xiaoyi, 2012). In 1872, Lu Bodu moved the school to Tou-sè-wè, where he established the Drawing Department of the Tou-sè-wè Orphanage Craft Workshop (i.e., the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop), continuing the systematic teaching model. After Lu Bodu’s death in 1880, Liu Dezhai became director and advanced the pedagogical system to a new stage.

Liu Dezhai compiled several art textbooks, including *Huishi Qianshuo* (*A Concise Introduction to Drawing*) (Fig. 3), *Qianbi Xihuatie* (*A Copybook for Pencil Drawing*), and *Huaguan Jilüe* (*Brief Account of the Art Workshop*). Of these, *Huishi Qianshuo* (*A Concise Introduction to Drawing*) and *Qianbi Xihuatie* (*A Copybook for Pencil Drawing*), published by the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop in 1907, were the relatively compre-

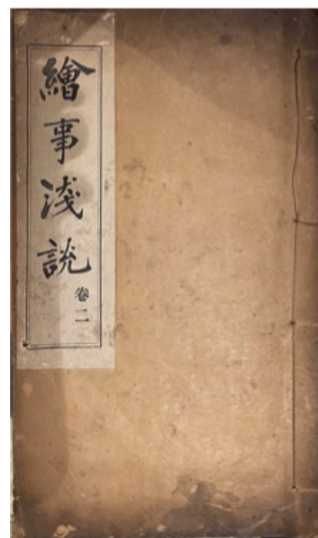


Fig. 3 A Concise Introduction to Drawing, Vol. 2, 1907

hensive introductory drawing manuals of their time.

*Huishi Qianshuo* (*A Concise Introduction to Drawing*) consists of two volumes. The first volume outlines foundational methods of drawing instruction, including introductory techniques, brush handling, proper posture, and line-drawing methods. It emphasizes that: “students of painting should first practice line drawing, just as students of calligraphy begin with brushstrokes. Lines may be horizontal, vertical, or curved. One should first master horizontal lines, then vertical lines, and only afterward curved lines. Practice should continue until lines of varying thickness, spacing, and inclination are rendered in balanced proportion and curves can be executed with ease ...”[9] (Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop, 1907). In its discussion of line drawing, the text further notes that “horizontal lines should first be mastered, followed by vertical and diagonal lines, before proceeding to curved lines ...”[10] (Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop, 1907). The book also states that “For a painter, copying occupies a lower stage, whereas creation represents a higher artistic attainment. Mere imitation relies entirely on the thought and skill of predecessors; mechanically reproducing established models cannot produce genuine originality.”[11] (Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop, 1907).

The second volume focuses on figure drawing, covering facial structure, the depiction of eyes and noses, and proportional methods. It observes that “in drawing the human figure, one must understand anatomical structure as well as the principles of light, shadow, and spatial orientation. External appearance is grounded in skeletal form, while lighting, viewpoint, depth, and distance each vary accordingly; all accomplished artists working from life understand these principles.”[12] (Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop, 1907).

*Qianbi Xihuatie* (*A Copybook for Pencil Drawing*) is divided into three interconnected volumes: the first presents examples of lines and decorative patterns; the second, studies of

individual body parts; and the third, portrait studies. Organized according to a progressive pedagogical sequence, the series was compiled primarily for students of the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop and is regarded as one of the earliest modern drawing copybooks in China. Through these teaching materials, Liu Dezhai transformed the traditional model of oral instruction and imitation-based training into a standardized pedagogical framework grounded in sequential instruction and theoretical explanation, thereby further systematizing the teaching system of the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop.

Another significant expansion of the pedagogical system introduced by Liu Dezhai was the formal introduction of the works of French watercolorist Pierre Vignal (1855–1925) into classroom instruction. Liu attached great importance to the development of watercolor painting, and his students' works received numerous international awards. Extant records indicate that Liu discovered Vignal's works in the French illustrated magazine *L'Illustration* and, recognizing the great impact of Vignal's style on Western watercolor, "followed contemporary artistic developments by collecting Vignal's watercolors as they were successively published in the magazine, making them available for pedagogical study and copying practice"[13] (Chen Yaowang, 2015). Zhang Chongren later recalled: "Vignal was the principal channel for the introduction of Western watercolor into our country; all of us were his students." Thus, Vignal's watercolor works took on a central position in the teaching at the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop.

Vignal was a highly influential French watercolor painter of

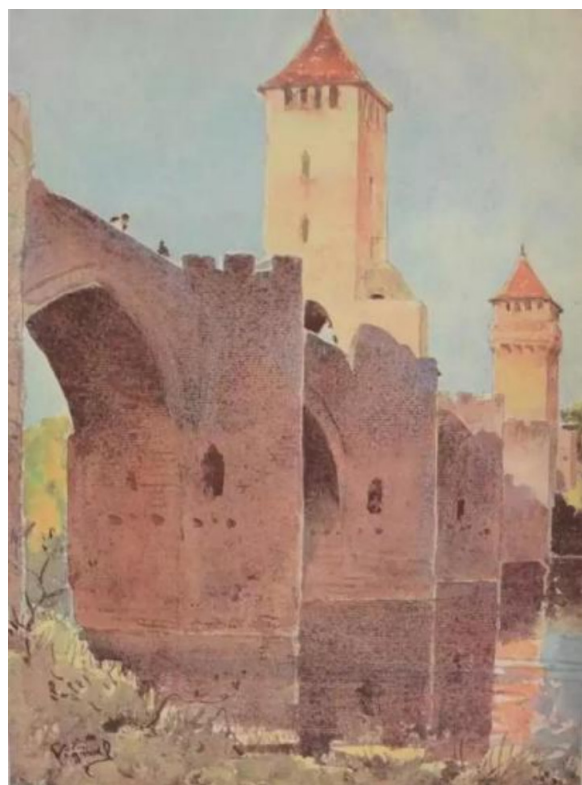


Fig. 4 Ancient Bridge and Bell Tower, watercolor by Pierre Vignal, n.d.

the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly known for plein-air painting. He adopted Impressionist methods for color observation, emphasized contrasts of light and shadow, warm and cool tones, and chromatic transparency while maintaining decisive brushwork without repeated reworking. His technique bore a strong resemblance to the *mogu* ("boneless") technique in Chinese painting, which facilitated its rapid reception and adaptation among Chinese painters. (Fig. 4)

Through Liu Dezhai's efforts, Vignal's watercolors became one of the earliest models of European watercolor painting formally adopted in China, providing watercolor instruction at the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop with a clearly defined stylistic and technical framework. Liu Dezhai, Zhou Xiang, Xu Yongqing, Zhang Yuguang, Zhang Chongren, and Yu Kai were all influenced by him. After Liu's death, his successor, Pan Guopan (Xavier Coupe, 1886–1971), who had studied in France and was deeply influenced by Vignal, continued to promote the circulation of Vignal's watercolors. Vignal's influence thus extended from Tou-sè-wè watercolor painters to subsequent generations of Shanghai-school watercolorists, including Yan Wenliang, Pan Sitong, and Ha Ding, a phenomenon later known as the "Vignal Effect."

### 3.The Continuation and Dissemination of Tou-sè-wè Watercolor Painting

#### 3.1 Xu Yongqing: Pioneer in Disseminating Tou-sè-wè Watercolor to Society

Xu Yongqing (1880–1953) was a native of Sijing, Songjiang, Shanghai. In 1893, he entered the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop and studied painting under Liu Dezhai. During his five years at the workshop, his academic performance was consistently top-ranked, and he received numerous awards. Liu Dezhai often gave him private lessons, making him one of his most accomplished disciples. In 1898, Xu stayed on as a teacher at the workshop for seven years, directly participating in Liu's pedagogical practice. In 1905, Xu joined the Commercial Press, embarking on a journey to disseminate Tou-sè-wè watercolor to the wider society. Over the next two decades, he established an art training school, opened a watercolor studio, directed the pictorial department of the Commercial Press, and taught at the Shanghai Fine Arts School, training calendar poster painters such as Hang Zhiying and Jin Meisheng. In 1930, he founded the Art Friends Society. In 1937, he moved to Hong Kong and established the Yongqing Art Association. In 1946, he relocated to Qingdao, where he continued to teach students. His textbooks, *A Copybook for Pencil Drawing for Middle Schools* and *The Method of Sketching Watercolor Landscapes from Nature*, followed the same pedagogical lineage as Liu Dezhai's teaching materials. Through these efforts, Xu brought the systematic teaching model of Tou-sè-wè into the public sphere and made significant contributions to early Chinese watercolor education.

Xu Yongqing achieved outstanding recognition in watercolor art. Hu Huaichen observed: “There were two early figures who introduced Western painting to China. One was Xu Yongqing... the watercolor painting that later flourished in Shanghai can be said to have begun with Xu”[14] (Hu Huaichen, 1933). In 1910, his *Squirrel and Landscape* won the Super Prize at the Nanyang Industrial Exposition, and in 1915, it also earned distinction at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Zhang Chongren commented on Xu Yongqing’s watercolors, stating that “every dot and stroke, whether central or oblique brush tip, surpassed what European watercolor painters had achieved”[15] (Dong Xingmao, 2005). The characteristics of his works are as follows:

First, the pursuit of realism in art. He attached great importance to the foundational training in drawing, categorizing drawing into forty types of lines and emphasizing: “Scribbled sketches, even if they fill dozens of sheets, are less valuable than a single meticulously executed work”[16] (Xu Yongqing and Guo Xiu, 1928). His representative work, *Mountain Shadows and Rippling Light* (Fig. 5), employs blocky brushstrokes to reproduce an autumn park scene, with distinct layers of distance, middle ground, and foreground, and full, substantial forms. This painting marks a shift from Liu Dezhai’s “linear” method to a “painterly” style that aims at “representing things as they appear to the eye”[17] (Heinrich Wölfflin, 1987), signifying an evolution in the visual conception of Tou-sè-wè watercolor. *Boating on the Lake* depicts the joyful scene of two modern women rowing a boat on a lake, reflecting women’s emancipation and the transformation of urban lifestyles.



Fig. 5 Mountain Shadows and Rippling Light, watercolor by Xu Yongqing, 1921

Second, the integration of the Chinese brush-and-ink tradition. Xu Yongqing had close ties with Ren Bonian and Wu Changshuo, and the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop’s transmission of traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting also influ-

enced his artistic orientation. Zhang Chongren noted: “Xu Yongqing, having studied painting at the Tou-sè-wè mission in his early years, absorbed nourishment drawn heavily from the achievements of the finest foreign painters of the late nineteenth century, and also frequently associated with Ren Bonian and Wu Changshuo, thereby gaining a profound understanding of Chinese painting...”[18] (Zhang Chongren, 1962). In terms of brush-and-ink concepts, Xu emphasized that “if a natural scene has light and dark tones, the painter should render those tones on paper.” He paid great attention to the mood and artistic conception of his paintings, requiring his students to study the subject before sketching: “One must have a clear idea of what mood to express and what method to use in which part.”[19] (Huang Shulin, 2013). These qualities are evident in works such as *West Lake in Hangzhou*, *Mountain Shadows and Rippling Light*, and *Jichang Garden in Wuxi*.

Third, the commercial dissemination of watercolor. Chen Baoyi commented that Xu Yongqing’s watercolors display “quite fresh and elegant brushwork, and as a style of Western-style painting of that period, they were sufficiently interesting to attract a new audience”[20] (Chen Baoyi, 1942). In the early twentieth century, he produced dozens of cover illustrations for *Novel Times* and *Women’s Times*, focusing on female students and fashionable women, using linear contours, bright colors, and flat gray washes. He painted calendar posters (yuefenpai) for about twenty years, collaborating with Zheng Mantuo to pioneer the “brush-wiping watercolor” technique (cabi shuicai). At the time, it was said, “Zheng’s figures, Xu’s landscapes”, thereby elevating watercolor from religious imagery and pedagogical models into popular visual culture.

### 3.2 Zhang Chongren: An Artist from Tou-sè-wè to the World

Zhang Chongren (1907–1998) was a native of Qibao Town, Minhang, Shanghai. After losing his mother at the age of four, he was sent to the Tou-sè-wè Orphanage Craft Workshop. In 1921, he joined the photo-engraving department of Tou-sè-wè, where he studied photo-engraving, French, oil painting, and watercolor under Brother An Jingzhai, and studied calligraphy and classical Chinese under Ma Xiangbo. During his time at the workshop, he first copied *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, then learned pencil drawing, and later copied Vignal’s watercolors. Brother An often took him outdoors to sketch, deepening his understanding of color changes in natural light. He also frequently sought advice on watercolor techniques from Xu Yongqing.

After completing his training, Zhang left Tou-sè-wè in 1928 and, through his outstanding watercolor works, earned the opportunity to study abroad. In 1931, he was admitted to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Brussels. Upon graduation, he received the King Albert Gold Medal of Belgium and the Gold Medal of the City of Brussels. He also assisted the



cartoonist Hergé in creating *Tintin in the Far East: The Blue Lotus*. In 1936, Zhang returned to Shanghai and founded the Chongren Studio, training numerous young artists. In 1985, he moved to France, where he died in 1998. Zhang Chongren's watercolors were deeply influenced by Vignal, with still life and landscape as his primary subjects. His work exhibits the following characteristics:

First, the inheritance and deepening of Vignal's watercolor style. While studying at Tou-sè-wè, Zhang mainly copied Vignal's works, making Vignal his formative influence. Zhang believed that "the characteristic effect of watercolor painting is transparency, fluidity, lightness, and conciseness, which are also the highest standards of watercolor technique"[21] (Zhang Chongren, 1964)—a belief aligned with Vignal's artistic ideals. He never used Chinese white, stating that watercolor "is not suitable for repeated alterations, as that would cause it to lose its transparent and fresh qualities"[22] (Shanghai Zhang Chongren Art Research and Exchange Center / Zhang Chongren Memorial Hall, 2007). In 1935, during his European travels, Zhang created works such as *Tower Shadows and Rippling Light* and *Morning Light in a Humble Alley*, which display a strong "Vignal style." These works employ direct painting techniques, with multiple colors embedded in a single brushstroke, and use the distribution of color patches to express spatial depth and light-dark contrasts, showing a tendency toward flatness and compositional structure.

Second, the conscious choice at the intersection of Chinese and Western cultures. After returning to China in 1935, Zhang retained European watercolor techniques while incorporating Chinese painting methods. In subject matter, he chose objects closely related to his living environment, demonstrating a realist sensibility. *Fish and Scallions by a Basket* (1942) depicts a common home-style dish in Jiangnan towns, reflecting the simple lifestyle and "Chinese" culinary taste of ordinary people. *Shanghai City God Temple* (1938, Fig. 6) portrays the daily life of a Shanghai street market: a fashionable young woman in an elegant qipao emerges from the ancient temple, her refined bearing contrasting with the old architecture behind her, while street vendors enthusiastically beckon customers. The colors are bright and lively, incorporating the brushwork of Chinese freehand painting to create a warm and vibrant atmosphere. Zhang Chongren remarked: "No watercolor artist in China can avoid the influence of Chinese painting techniques"[23] (Shanghai Zhang Chongren Art Research and Exchange Center / Zhang Chongren Memorial Hall, 2007). In composition, he admired the "blank space" (liubai) of Chinese painting, believing that "leaving the background unpainted is better than painting it, as it increases conciseness and condensation", allowing "the viewer to use his own imagination to compose the scene in his own mind"[24] (Zhang Chongren, 1964). Regarding materials, he used British Whatman watercolor paper and Winsor & Newton pigments. For brushes, he chose a custom-made deer-and-

weasel-hair calligraphy brush from Rongbaozhai in Beijing—a tangible testament to his cultural choice.

Zhang Chongren developed an artistic philosophy that can be expressed as "taking Eastern spirit as the essence and Western material as the instrument"[25] (Yan Youren, 2007). If Xu Yongqing brought Tou-sè-wè watercolor into the commercial and mass communication sphere, Zhang accomplished a deeper fusion of Chinese and Western watercolor languages. Through his Chongren Studio, he trained successors such as Wu Yiqing, Wang Hui, Ha Ding, and Fei Shengfu, ensuring the continued transmission of the Vignal style. He was both the culmination of Tou-sè-wè watercolor education and a bridge that carried this tradition to the international stage. In addition, Zhou Xiang, Zhang Yuguang, Yu Kai, and others were all shaped by Tou-sè-wè watercolor teaching and the Vignal style.

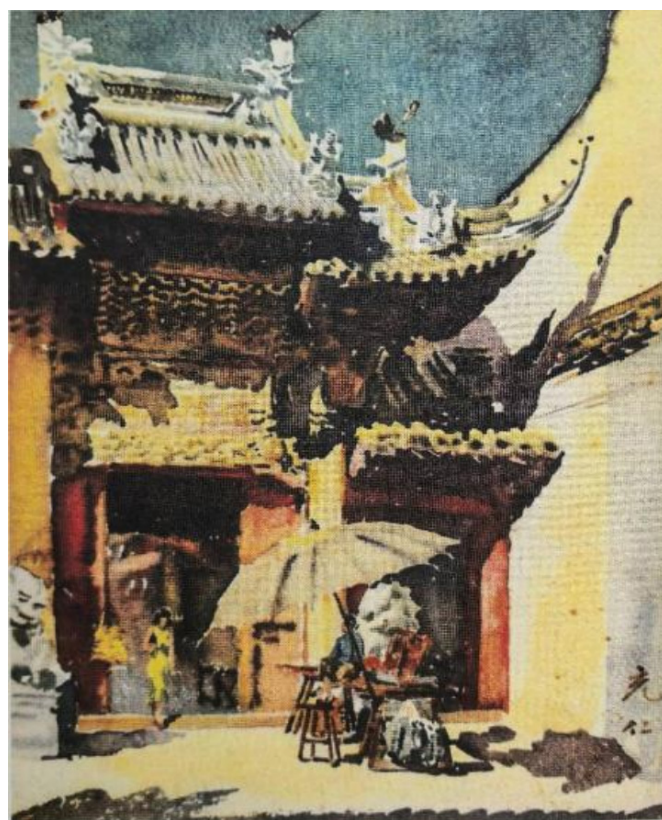


Fig. 5 Mountain Shadows and Rippling Light, watercolor by Xu Yongqing, 1921

#### 4. The Artistic Association between Liu Dezhai and Ren Bonian and Its Influence

In the late nineteenth century, Liu Dezhai forged close ties with Ren Bonian, a painter of the Shanghai School. Under Liu's guidance, Ren Bonian studied drawing, adopted Liu's preferred 3B pencil, and also followed Liu in sketching. Shen Zhiyu noted: "Liu's foundation in Western drawing was solid, which had a certain impact on Ren Bonian's practice

of sketching. Whenever Ren went out, he always carried a sketchbook and used a pencil to capture any scene that caught his eye. This habit of pencil sketching was not unrelated to his association with Liu.”[26] (Shen Zhiyu, 1961). Zhu Boxiong and Chen Ruilin believed that the Shanghai-school painters, “because of the influence of foreign painting... dared to assimilate the western expressive methods into their painting techniques, making their works appealing to both refined and popular tastes.”[27] (Zhu Boxiong and Chen Ruilin, 1989). These examples show that Ren Bonian’s sketching and drawing were shaped by Liu Dezhai and Western-style art instruction at the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop.

Ren Bonian’s adoption of Western methods can be observed in two aspects. First, drawing and modeling. This is particularly evident in his portraiture. *Zhao Xiaoyun’s Sitting Alone in a Bamboo Grove* (1883) and *Portraits of Grandfather Zhao Dechang and His Wife* (1885) employ chiaroscuro at the turning points of facial features to shape volume and structural characteristics. The costumes are outlined in ink and then colored with washes, while the backgrounds utilize the principles of perspective to create three-dimensional space. Second, watercolor’s color and language. Ren Bonian’s bird-and-flower paintings adopt the “boneless” (*mogu*) method, applying both ink and color with bright and vivid effects, closely resembling Vignal’s watercolors. Works such as *Hibiscus and Lilac* and *Ten Thousand Years of Heavenly Sons* display rich color gradations, with multiple color variations within a single brushstroke. The French painter Dagnan-Bouveret commented: “How lively the spirit in these vivid watercolors, how

subtle the harmony!”[28] (Li Chao, 2004). Furthermore, Ren Xun was commissioned by the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop to produce the oil painting *Xu Li Discussing the Way*, indicating that the interaction between Shanghai-school painters and the Tou-sè-wè workshop was not uncommon.

## 5. Conclusion

Liu Dezhai served as director of the Tou-sè-wè Art Workshop for thirty-two years, guiding it to its historical zenith, yet almost all of his watercolor works have been lost. Liu’s tenure marked a decisive transition in Tou-sè-wè painting from imitation to independent artistic creation. By compiling textbooks and introducing Vignal’s watercolor works, he transformed Western-style painting instruction into a systematic pedagogical program. Through his students and his artistic association with Ren Bonian, his influence extended into commercial art, broader urban society, and the Shanghai School painting circle. He was a pivotal figure in the localization and systematization of Western-style painting education. The localized creative approach, the systematic pedagogical framework, and the networks of artistic transmission he pioneered constitute his core artistic legacy. The early development of Chinese watercolor painting was shaped through the continuation, adaptation, and expansion of this legacy, gradually giving rise to localized expression and independent artistic creation.

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# Taoist Patterns in Traditional Chinese Residential Architecture

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

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

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

The ideological origins of Taoism stretch back to the Pre-Qin Period (c. 21st century BC – 221 BC), deriving from ancient nature worship, spiritual sacrifice and shamanic traditions. By offering sacrifices to deities of heaven, earth, the sun, the moon, mountains and rivers, ancient ancestors established the primitive belief in the Correspondence Between Heaven and Humanity. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States

periods (770–221 BC), Laozi (Li Er) authored *Tao Te Ching*, advancing the philosophical propositions that Tao engenders all things and Tao emulates nature. Zhuangzi (Zhuang Zhou) compiled *Nanhua Jing*, advocating spiritual transcendence and the equality of all existence, which laid the theoretical cornerstone of Taoist thought.

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

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

Taoism venerates Tao as the supreme cosmic principle, with its belief system anchored in three core dimensions: the primacy of Tao, immortal veneration, and the pursuit of longevity. As the ultimate essence of the universe, Tao is regarded as the origin and inherent law of all creation — formless and intangible, yet nurturing every living being. Taoism advocates harmony between humanity and the natural world by adhering to the way of Tao. Immortal worship humanizes the abstract

Tao into a structured pantheon, including the Three Pure Ones (Yuanshi Tianzun, Lingbao Tianzun, Daode Tianzun), the Four Heavenly Sovereigns, the Eight Immortals, and the Three Stars of Fortune, Prosperity and Longevity. Taoist doctrine holds that mortals can achieve immortality through spiritual cultivation and transcend the cycle of life and death. The quest for longevity represents Taoism's ultimate spiritual goal, encouraging practitioners to attain eternal life and spiritual liberation through self-discipline, elixir refinement, physical cultivation and virtuous deeds.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## I. Taoist Figurative Patterns

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

### 1. Pangu Pattern

Also known as Yuanshi Tianzun, Pangu is honored by numerous titles: Yuqing Yuanshi Tianzun, Grand Lord Pangu, Supreme Heavenly Lord of Jade Capital, Supreme Taoist Honored One, Primordial Heavenly Lord and Purple Sovereign. Universally recognized as the progenitor of Taoism and the

creator of heaven and earth, Pangu ranks foremost among the Three Pure Ones, Taoism's highest divine trinity. *Comprehensive Records of Immortals Through Dynasties* describes him as the Ancestor presiding over the Heavenly Realm, the ruler of all creation.

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



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

## 2. Pattern of the Three Pure Ones

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

The most prevalent rendition portrays the Three Pure Ones refining celestial elixirs. The scene is set amid swirling mist, mountain vistas with flowing rivers, secluded dense forests and ethereal heavenly palaces. Perched on a steep cliff terrace, a gourd-shaped elixir furnace billows sacred smoke skyward. Supreme Lord Laozi sits leisurely upon stacked stones beside a small bridge; alternatively, the Three Pure Ones each hold auspicious mudras, gazing intently at the furnace's flickering flames.

This pattern conveys that elixir refinement embodies the Heavenly Tao, symbolizing spiritual self-cultivation, the nurturing of innate wisdom, and the ultimate attainment of wisdom to navigate all worldly affairs with effortless ease.

## 3. Pattern of the Eastern King and Western Queen Mother

The composition features the Eastern King seated solemnly in



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

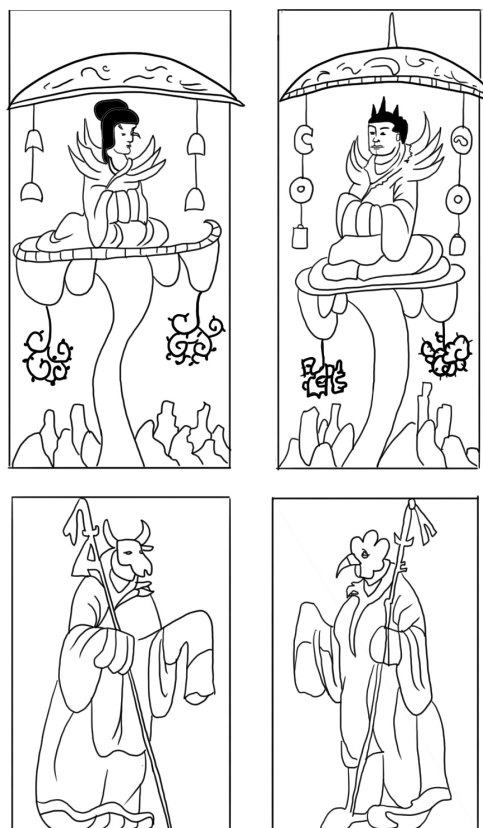


Fig.3 Han-dynasty brick relief: The serpent-bodied Eastern King and Western Queen Mother practicing spiritual cultivation.

cross-legged meditation, flanked on either side by openwork carvings of kneeling maiden attendants. Surrounding him are intricately carved phoenixes, songbirds, qilin, ducks and other mythical creatures.

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



the scene.

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

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

#### 4. Pattern of the Five Great Mountain Emperors

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

Each deity wears an ornate Nine-Dan Sun Essence crown,



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

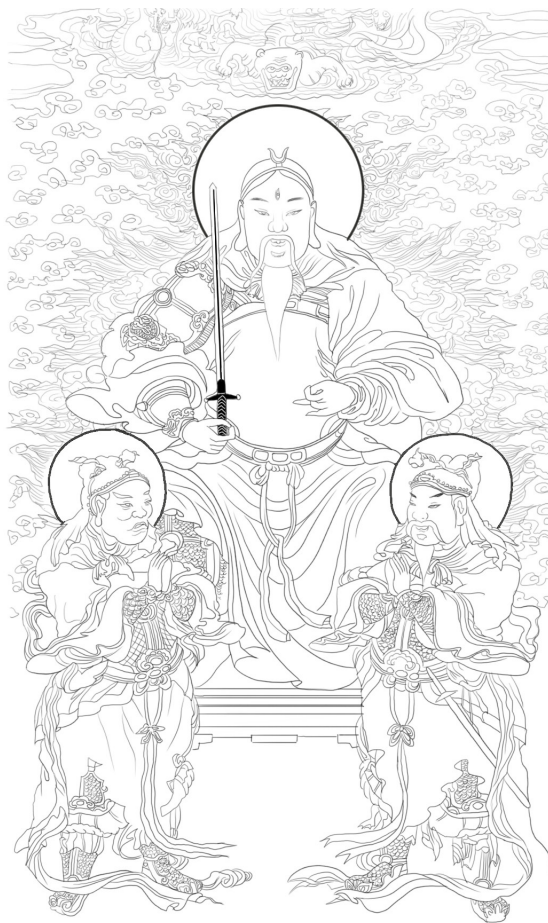


Fig.5 Qing-dynasty painted ornamentation: The True Martial Great Emperor performing rituals to invoke blessings.

pearl-embroidered imperial robes, and a luminous celestial jade seal at the waist.

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

## 5. Pattern of the True Martial Great Emperor

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

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



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

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

## 6. Pattern of the God of Literature

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

Legend recounts that Zhang Yazhi, a native of Mengxi in Si-

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

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



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

examination triumph.

## 7. Pattern of the Heavenly Official Bestowing Blessings

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

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

- The left figure holds an official crown or seal, while the right bears a ritual goblet or sacred deer, or carries inscribed couplets reading *Heavenly Official Bestows Blessings* and *First-Rank Court Official*, symbolizing official promotion and

career advancement.

- Combinations of ruyi scepter, imperial seal and sword signify unparalleled mastery in both civil and military affairs.



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

- Paired with the God of Literature, he represents leisurely ease and tranquil contentment.
- Accompanied by Heavenly Kui and Heavenly Yue, he embodies gentle temperament and widespread admiration.
- Matched with symbolic emblems of fortune, power and academic success, he denotes simultaneous fame and wealth.

Flanked by the Left and Right Guardian Immortals, he symbolizes contentment with one's lot, alongside blessings for good fortune and disaster abatement.

## 8. Pattern of Ling Lun with Auspicious Beasts

This motif is mostly arranged in symmetrical compositions for residential decoration.

Legend holds that Ling Lun served as court musician under the Yellow Emperor. Over 4,500 years ago, he established the tonal system and formulated the twelve ancient musical scales, earning him the title of the founding father of Chinese music. *Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei · Ancient Music* records: "In antiquity, the Yellow Emperor commanded Ling Lun to establish musical pitch."

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

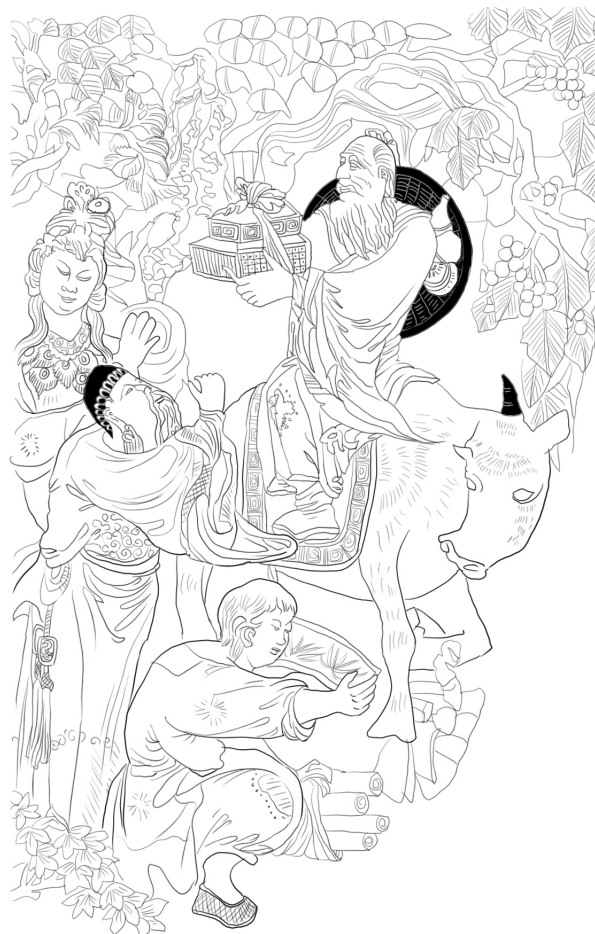


Fig.9 Qing-dynasty wood carving: Laozi riding a green ox and bearing heavenly scriptures on his journey from the mountains.

melodies of life.

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

This pattern expresses the joy of victory and celebration, embodies the subduing of demons and disaster relief through



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



sacrificial rituals, and conveys harmonious prosperity through the beauty of music.

## 9. Pattern of Laozi

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

Two classic thematic depictions:

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

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

## 10. Pattern of Zhuangzi Dreaming of Butterflies

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

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

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

## 11. Pattern of Wang Zhi and the Decayed Axe Handle

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

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

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

Symbolic implications:

- (1)To accomplish great undertakings, one must uphold firm resolve, resist external distractions and persevere relentlessly.
- (2) Time passes fleetingly; people should cherish every moment and devote themselves to meaningful pursuits.



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

(3) Mythological wisdom offers a lens to interpret mysterious and unfamiliar natural phenomena.

(4) The game of Go demands rigorous strategy; one should view worldly vicissitudes with calm detachment and embody the Taoist spiritual realm of *one thought spanning a thousand years*.

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



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

## 12. Pattern of Ge Hong Refining Elixirs

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

tecting mortal lives and earning enduring reverence from common people.

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

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

## 13. Patterns of the Eight Immortals and Hidden Eight Immortals

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

### Individual Immortal Iconography

#### (1) Iron-Crutch Li (Li Xuan)

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

#### (2) Zhongli Quan (Han Zhongli)

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

#### (3) Zhang Guo Lao

A Tang Dynasty Taoist priest renowned for miraculous medical skills and profound wisdom, honored by Emperor Xuanzong of Tang. Portrayed as an elderly long-bearded sage in Taoist crown and robes, he holds a walking staff and rides a white crane, white bat, or a white donkey ridden backward.

Background inscriptions such as *Qixia Temple* and *Ancient Immortal Cave* often feature in compositions. He carries a fish drum to bestow blessings upon the world, symbolizing familial moral heritage and compassion. Riding backward serves as a reminder for mortals to reflect on their lives, embodying benevolence and wisdom that bring good fortune, health and prosperity.

(4)Lü Dongbin (Lü Yan)

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

(5)He Xianggu (He Qiong)

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

(6)Lan Caihe

A Tang Dynasty hermit embodying all walks of life: male and female, young and old, wealthy and poor, beautiful and ugly, virtuous and malicious. He wears a straw hat and tattered robes, one foot shod and the other bare, holding a flower basket while wandering city streets, begging and singing in joyful intoxication. A master brewer who could drink heavily without inebriation, he is revered as the patron saint of the brewing industry. Paired with the God of Longevity, pine trees and cranes, he conveys blessings of longevity; a flower basket filled with celestial treasures symbolizes divine foresight, familial harmony and prosperous descendants.

(7)Han Xiangzi

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



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



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





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



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

joy, health and prosperity.

#### (8)Cao Guojiu (Cao Jingxiu)

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

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

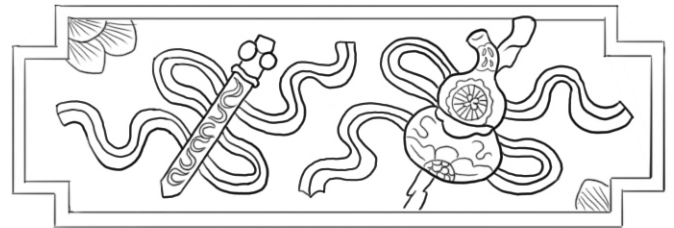


Fig.13-5 Qing-dynasty wood carving: Sword, gourd.

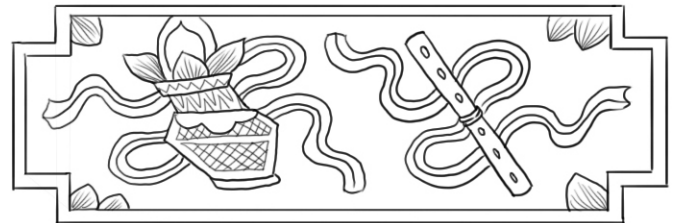


Fig.13-6 Qing-dynasty wood carving: flower basket, bamboo flute.

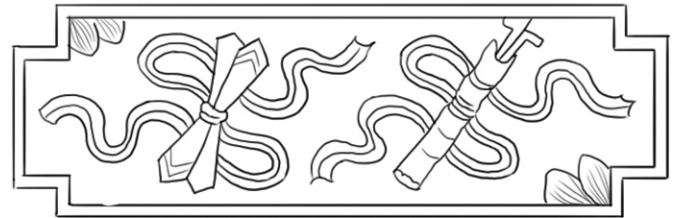


Fig.13-7 Qing-dynasty wood carving: jade tablet, fish drum.

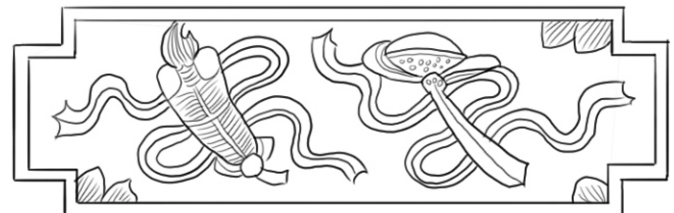


Fig.13-8 Qing-dynasty wood carving:palm-leaf fan, lotus blossom.

### Hidden Eight Immortals Pattern

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

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



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

### 14. Pattern of Liu Hai Teasing the Golden Toad

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

One day, he healed an injured three-legged golden toad, which repaid his kindness by transforming into a graceful

maiden and marrying him. The toad spat forth gold ingots and treasure coins, becoming a timeless symbol of wealth attraction and prosperity.

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



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



## 15. Pattern of Zhong Kui Escorting His Sister's Wedding

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



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

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

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

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

## 16. Pattern of the Wealth-Attracting Boy

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



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

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

## 17. Pattern of Zhang Sanfeng

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

The motif is set against the rugged mountain backdrops of iconic Taoist sacred sites: Qiyun Mountain (Anhui), Wudang Mountain (Hubei), Qingcheng Mountain (Sichuan), Longhu Mountain (Jiangxi). Cliff faces bear inscriptions such as *Blessing and Longevity Mountain, Qingcheng, Five*





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

*Immortal Caves and Tianshi Mountain.* Taoist temples, feng shui pagodas and martial practitioners adorn the slopes, with Zhang Sanfeng depicted refining elixirs or practicing Tai Chi. Surrounding decorative elements include pine, cypress, lotus, peony and interlocking flowers; auspicious beasts feature dragons, qilin, celestial bulls, heavenly steeds, sea horses, lions, deer, peacocks, cranes, bats, fish and butterflies.

## 18. Pattern of Turning Stones into Sheep

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

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

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

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

## 19. Taoist Ritual Implements and Hundred Treasures

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

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

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

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

- Pearl: Wealth, perfection, official rank and a promising future
- Celestial sphere: Eternal peace
- Dragon gate: Academic success, career promotion and illustrious achievement
- Ritual furnace: National sovereignty, social status, peace and prosperity
- Gold/silver ingot: Abundant wealth; homophonic symbolism of numerous descendants and talented offspring
- Ancient coin: Round outer rim representing heaven, square inner hole representing earth, imperial reign inscription representing humanity; symbolizing the harmony of heaven, earth and humanity with the power to reverse cosmic fortunes
- Coral: Nobility, authority, happiness and eternal bliss
- Rhinoceros horn: Divine power, good fortune, physical health, career success and evil dispelling
- Rhinoceros horn cup: Homophonically symbolizing generations, embodying respect for elders and affluent daily life
- Books/Scroll paintings: Scholarly heritage, wisdom and spiritual nourishment for life
- Bronze mirror: Knowledge and wisdom; used in ritual worship and marital harmony; decorates architecturally inauspicious influences

picious spaces to ward off evil and protect household peace; employed by officials to groom their bearing

- Pine tree: Integrity, perseverance and moral nobility; symbolizing longevity, peace and good fortune
- Red leaves: Moral purity, friendship and auspicious career prospects
- Mugwort leaves: Blessings, familial harmony and physical wellness; dispelling illness and misfortune
- Plantain leaves: Supreme auspiciousness, vast family fortune and boundless vitality
- Glossy ganoderma: Good fortune, prosperity and miraculous healing power
- Ruyi scepter: Power, wealth and the fulfillment of wishes; symbolizing continuous auspicious events
- Auspicious clouds: Propitious omens, celebration and prosperity; embodying thriving family lineage and business ventures
- Hundred Treasures waist belt: Great wealth and affluence
- Court tablet: High official rank and generous emoluments

#### Square Sheng Pattern

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

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

#### Folk Eight Treasures Pattern

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

- Stone chime: Invites celestial deities, dispels disasters and invokes blessings; homophonically representing celebration, symbolizing prosperity, abundance and peaceful times. Paired with calligraphy, ink slabs and water droppers, it encourages scholars to pursue diligent study for a blessed life.
- Silver ingot & ancient coin: Material wealth
- Pearl, coral & rhinoceros horn: Mystery and noble dignity
- Ruyi scepter: The fulfillment of heartfelt wishes, blessings of fortune and prosperity



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

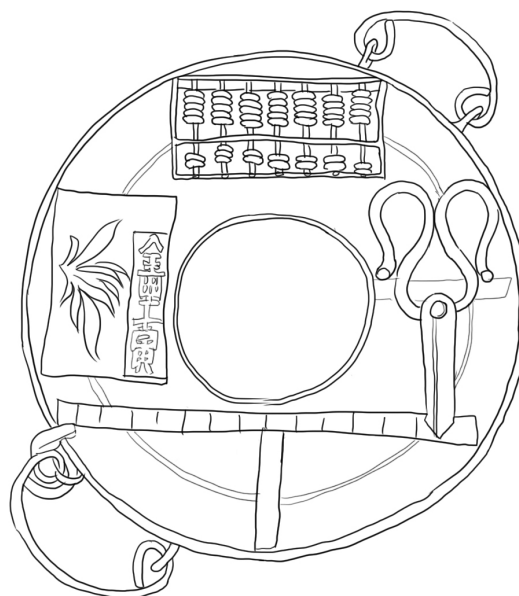


Fig.20 Qing-dynasty silver artifact: Hundred Treasures pattern.

Combination variations:

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

Paired with rhinoceros horns and vases: Official authority, self-protection, evil dispelling, career success and enduring good fortune

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

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

- Rice sieve + abacus + Eight Trigrams: A powerful talisman to neutralize evil and secure household peace
- Abacus: Prosperous population and wealth; intelligent children, steady academic progress and prudent household management for brides
- Almanac: Selection of auspicious dates; advocating integrity, moral virtue and self-cultivation
- Measuring ruler: Enduring happiness for descendants, harmonious marriage, career advancement and proper conduct
- Silver bell: Intelligent children, tranquility and good fortune

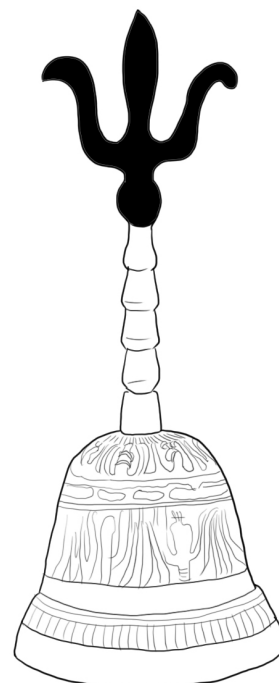


Fig.21 Qing-dynasty bronze artifact: Ritual hand bell.

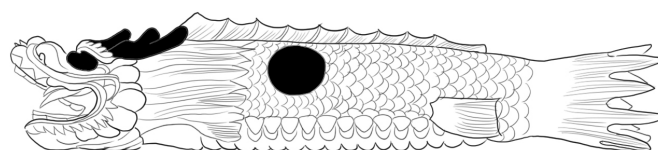


Fig.21 Qing-dynasty bronze artifact: Ritual hand bell.

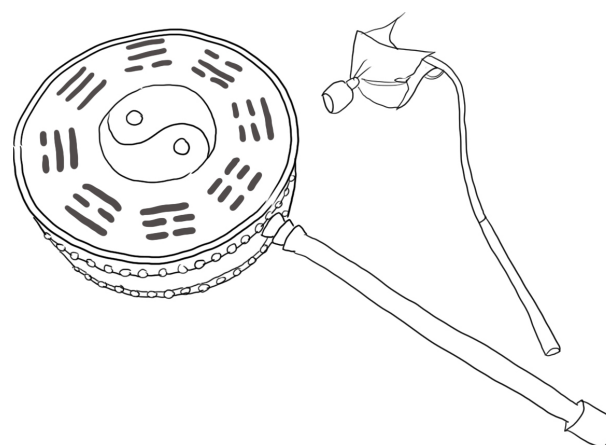


Fig.21 Qing-dynasty bronze artifact: Ritual hand bell.

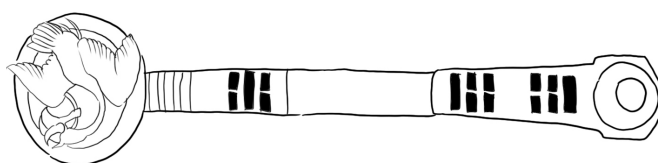


Fig.21 Qing-dynasty bronze artifact: Ritual hand bell.



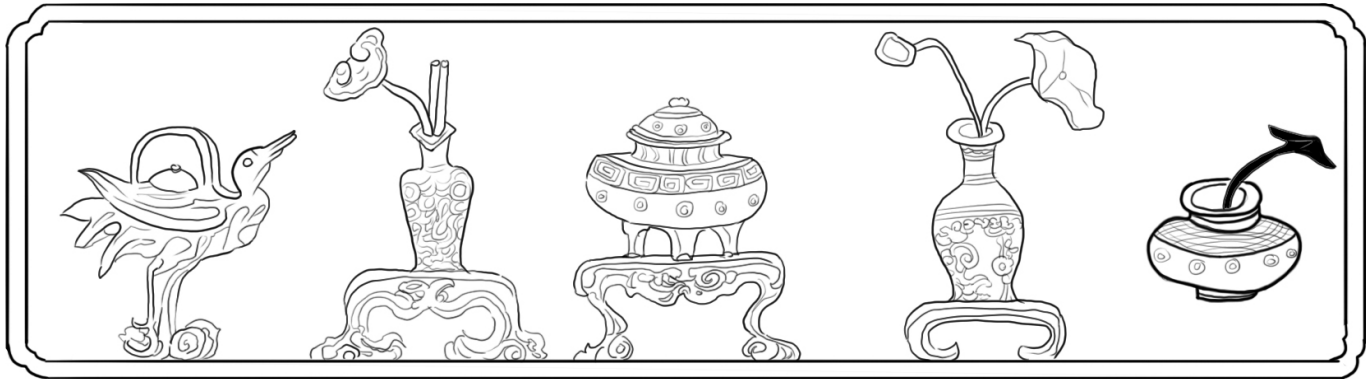


Fig.25 Qing-dynasty wood carving: Water basin with ritual ladle.

## 21. Ritual Bell Pattern

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

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

## 22. Wooden Fish Pattern

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

## 23. Ritual Drum Pattern

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

## 24. Ruyi Scepter Handle Pattern

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

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

## 25. Water Basin Pattern

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

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

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# International Dissemination Research on China's Covered Bridge Culture by American Scholars Knapp and Miller

*Author: Wang Qijun*

**Abstract:** My academic bond with American scholar Ronald G. Knapp originated from an international symposium on traditional Chinese dwellings held in 1991. This academic encounter fostered a decades-long profound friendship and continuous scholarly exchanges spanning over thirty years. At the International Symposium on Ronald G. Knapp's Research of Chinese Traditional Dwellings hosted by the School of Architecture, Tsinghua University on 5 December, 2018, , I delivered a speech systematically introducing his fruitful achievements and academic value in the research of traditional Chinese residential architecture.

I first met another American scholar Terry E. Miller at the International Symposium on Chinese Covered Bridges jointly held in Shanghai and Qingyuan, Zhejiang Province in 2019 that was also attended by Ronald Knapp. The brief gathering forged sincere academic friendship, and we maintained close email correspondence afterward to exchange academic views and discuss research progress on Chinese covered bridge culture. Regrettably, Mr. Terry E. Miller passed away on October 1, 2025. The academic circle lost a devoted researcher dedicated to promoting covered bridge culture worldwide, and I lost a cherished overseas friend.

As an exquisite treasure of distinctive traditional wooden architecture in China, Chinese covered bridges have evolved for thousands of years. They perfectly integrate ancient Chinese construction techniques, folk customs and regional aesthetic concepts, serving as precious cultural carriers embodying China's agricultural civilization, landscape philosophy and humanistic sentiments, and an indispensable part of fine traditional Chinese culture.

For a long time, due to cultural disparities and barriers in international academic discourse, Chinese covered bridges, which are called in Chinese *langqiao*, "corridor bridges," had gained little recognition in global architectural academia, suffering from insufficient academic voice and neglected research status. Ronald G. Knapp, a senior American sinologist, and Terry E. Miller, an interdisciplinary cultural scholar, have devoted decades to the research of Chinese covered bridge culture. With broad interdisciplinary global perspectives, persistent field investigations, systematic academic exploration and achievement publication, they essentially eliminated Western academia's biased understanding and regional isolation regarding Chinese covered bridges.

Their fifteen-year cross-border joint research systematically filled the global research gaps on Chinese covered bridges. These once little-known regional folk architectural relics have gradually earned fame as world-class architectural heritage and become key candidates for global cultural heritage listing. Through their talks and publications, they have made irreplaceable contributions to the international spread of traditional Chinese architectural culture, equal Sino-foreign architectural cultural dialogue and improvement of the global cultural heritage conservation system. Based on their academic careers, core research findings and cross-border scholarly practices, this paper reviews the whole process of their efforts to bring Chinese covered bridges to the world and integrate them into global architectural civilization, and interprets the core value of their academic exploration and far-reaching significance of cross-cultural communication.

**Keywords:** Chinese covered bridges; *langqiao*, cross-cultural communication; Ronald G. Knapp; Terry E. Miller; architectural heritage; international academic research





Group photo taken during a covered bridge survey in the mountains of Chongqing. From right to left: Terry E. Miller, Ronald G. Knapp, Liu Jie.



A break photo taken during the survey of Chinese covered bridges. Terry E. Miller (far left), Ronald G. Knapp (far right) with A. Chester Ong, a professional photographer who has worked with Knapp on many books for more than twenty years.

## 1. Introduction

Covered bridges are complex architectural structures featuring transportation function, practical utility, artistic aesthetics and profound humanistic connotations. Three independent covered bridge architectural traditions have taken shape globally, namely European, North American, and Chinese styles.

Though there are archaeological examples of covered timber bridges that date to the Han dynasty, the most outstanding date to the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and Song Dynasty (960–1279). Chinese covered bridges reached their peak prosperity in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and Qing Dynasty (1636–1912). They are widely scattered across mountainous southern China including Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi and Hunan Provinces, adapting to the rainy, humid climate and riverside mountainous landforms of regions south of the Yangtze River and mountainous areas of Zhejiang and Fujian. They are also



Qiancheng Bridge, Pingnan County, Fujian Province. Photo by Wang Qijun

found in abundance in Yunnan and Sichuan, among other locations.

Different from Western covered bridges which principally serve passage and rain sheltering, wooden arch covered bridges prevalent in Zhejiang and Fujian as well as elsewhere boast unique nail-free mortise-and-tenon arch structures, sophisticated ancient construction craftsmanship, millennium-old folk sacrificial culture, diverse public social functions and over a thousand existing relics nationwide. They form an unparalleled traditional Chinese architectural system superior to European and North American counterparts in structural sophistication, artistic aesthetics, and humanistic depth, fully showcasing the wisdom and ingenuity of ancient Chinese working people.

Before the 21st century, Western academic research on covered bridges centered on European and North American examples, forming a rigid Western-centric research paradigm. Western scholars held fragmented and one-sided perceptions of Chinese covered bridges, lacking basic cultural cognition and systematic English monographs. This brilliant gem of traditional Chinese architecture and vital evidence of millennial Chinese civilization was marginalized in mainstream global architectural heritage studies, with its unique architectural, cultural and historical values unrecognized internationally.

Against the backdrop of limited Sino-foreign academic exchanges and insufficient global publicity of Chinese covered bridges, Ronald G. Knapp, emeritus professor of State University of New York at New Paltz, saw his first *langqiao* in 1987 in the mountains of southern Zhejiang. Little by little, his understanding of the extent of this structural form began to take shape. Terry E. Miller, professor of Kent State University, in time joined him and then they stood out as the leading Western scholars committed to Chinese covered bridge research. Driven by passion and reverence for traditional Chinese culture, the two scholars together conducted fifteen years of cross-border collaborative research. Their comprehensive academic practices ranging from individual studies and theoretical sorting to global publicity and heritage conservation

reversed the marginal status of Chinese covered bridges in international academia, acting as pioneers promoting cross-ocean dissemination of traditional Chinese architectural culture and Sino-Western cultural integration.

## 2. Research Background and Academic Accomplishments of the Two Scholars

### 2.1 Ronald G. Knapp: Founding Authority for Global Popularization of Traditional Chinese Architecture

Ronald G. Knapp is a preeminent Western scholar specializing in Chinese historical geography, traditional rural architecture and ancient bridge art, and also a World Heritage evaluation expert of UNESCO. Having dedicated decades to researches on traditional Chinese architecture and landscape human settlements, he possesses profound sinological knowl-



The bookshelves at Ronald G. Knapp's home are filled with various Chinese-language books and documents about Chinese covered bridges.

edge, abundant field investigation experience and broad global heritage research vision.

Differing from conventional architectural researchers, he adopts historical geography as the core research perspective,

studying architectural evolution, regional diversity, humanistic context and heritage value of traditional Chinese buildings. He excels at horizontally comparing and positioning Chinese architecture within the global architectural civilization system, providing authoritative academic support for the international promotion and value definition of Chinese architectural culture.

Knapp is a pioneering founder who first launched systematic academic research on Chinese covered bridges in Western academia. He traveled to the China mainland scores of times from 1977 on after more than a decade of research in Taiwan, conducting field surveys and documentation in core covered bridge sites of southern Zhejiang and eastern Fujian. His research sorted out regional distribution rules, structural features, craftsmanship inheritance and historical evolution of



Over many decades, Ronald G. Knapp traveled to China scores of times to investigate traditional covered bridges and residential buildings. This photo captures him on the Wan'an Bridge in Fujian province.

Chinese covered bridges, earning him the reputation of the foremost international advocate for Chinese covered bridges.

Breaking away from Western-centric research stereotypes and biased labels on oriental architecture, he objectively and rigorously explored the architectural, humanistic and contemporary values of Chinese covered bridges, laying a solid academic foundation for subsequent Sino-US joint research and global cultural promotion. I have maintained over thirty years



of friendship with him, and his rigorous scholarship, modest attitude and sincere love for Chinese culture are deeply admirable.

## 2.2 Terry E. Miller: Interdisciplinary Researcher from a Distinguished Covered Bridge Academic Family

Terry E. Miller, while a renowned professor of ethnomusicology at Kent State University in Ohio, began during his teenage years in the company of his Father to devote his energies to studying American covered bridges. Nurtured by Western covered bridge academic theories from childhood, he has studied global covered bridge architecture for decades, mastering Western construction techniques, evaluation criteria and research frameworks.

His unique interdisciplinary background brought irreplaceable research advantages. Proficient in Western covered bridge theories, he interprets folk connotations, humanistic spirits and social functions of Chinese covered bridges from perspectives of cultural anthropology and folklore. His research breaks the technical-only limitation of traditional architectural studies, endowing Chinese covered bridge research with richer depth and human warmth.



Terry Miller with his wife Sara, who accompanied him on all his international trips, at a bridge in Guizhou province.

Miller's fascination with Chinese covered bridges began with a casual encounter in 2003. He was deeply impressed by the distinctive architectural shapes, landscape aesthetics, exquisite craftsmanship and harmonious integration between humanity and nature after seeing pictures of Chinese covered bridges in a travel brochure of Quanzhou, Fujian Province.

Having acknowledged the simple structure, single function and shallow humanistic connotation of Western covered bridges, Miller recognized the diversified cultural attributes of Chinese covered bridges integrating transportation, art, folk sacrifice, leisure and cultural inheritance. He then added to his lifelong research focus from Western covered bridges to rare and precious Chinese examples, launching fifteen years of cross-border field investigations and cooperative studies in collaboration with Knapp. Though our acquaintance started



A group of international covered bridge researchers in November 2013, Sixi, Taishun County, Zhejiang Province, China. From right to left: Liu Yan, then a PhD student at the Technical University in Munich and now an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, Kunming University of Science and Technology; Liu Jie, Professor in the School of Design at Shanghai Jiao Tong University; Terry and Sara Miller, Ronald G. Knapp, Emeritus Professor, State University of New York, New Paltz; Philip Caston, Professor of Building Documentation, Historical Building Research and Surveying at Neubrandenburg University of Applied Sciences; and Gong Difa, Gong Difa, the former curator of Shouning County Museum in Fujian.

relatively late, his sincere affection for Chinese culture and rigorous academic pursuit were fully reflected in our email communications. His sudden passing constitutes a great loss to Sino-foreign covered bridge research.

## 3. Core Process and Academic Practices of Global Dissemination of Chinese Covered Bridges

### 3.1 Initial Exploration: Groundbreaking Achievements Opening International Recognition (2008)

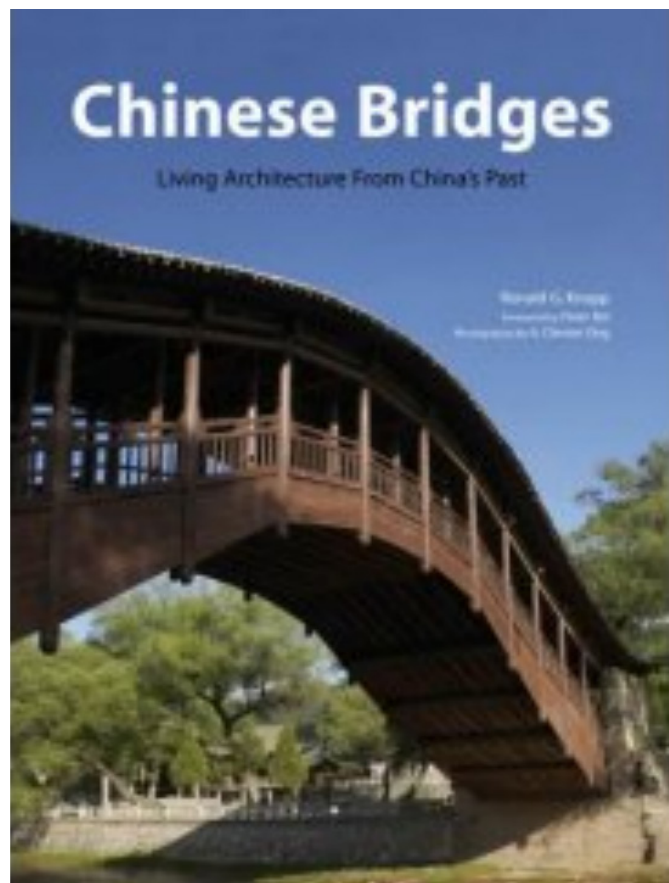


At the beginning of the 21st century, Sino-foreign architectural cultural exchanges remained inadequate, with no authoritative English publications introducing Chinese covered bridges, which were barely known overseas. Knapp took the lead in breaking this deadlock and published the academic monograph *CHINA'S COVERED BRIDGES* in 2008.

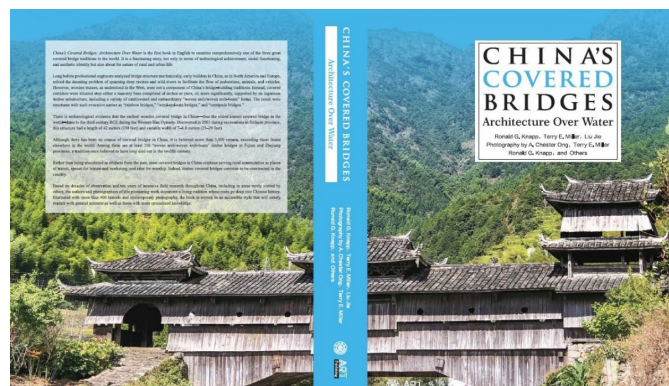
As the first comprehensive English academic work systematically illustrating the complete system of ancient Chinese

bridges, this book takes wooden arch covered bridges in Zhejiang and Fujian as core research objects, elaborating on millennial construction techniques, structural principles, regional distribution, historical evolution and cultural inheritance value of Chinese wooden arch covered bridges. At the time, Knapp had little knowledge of *langqiao* elsewhere in China that over the next decade was filled in by reading what Chinese scholars had written.

This landmark publication eliminated Western misunderstandings of traditional Chinese bridges and brought Zhejiang-Fujian wooden arch covered bridges into the core research scope of global architectural and heritage conservation circles. Leveraging his identity as a UNESCO World Heritage expert, Knapp continuously promoted the cultural value of Chinese covered bridges at international heritage assessments, academic conferences and university lectures. Knapp's first international article on the subject titled "Rainbows and Centipedes: 20th Century Discoveries of China's 'Lost' Bridges" was published in 2008. He subsequently was a UNESCO consultant in 2009 that lead to in success with the proposal 'Traditional Design and Practices for Building Chinese Wooden Arch Bridges' was inscribed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. He continues to advocate for the World Heritage nomination



With Gansu province's Baling Bridge on the cover, this 2008 book by Knapp included the first images in an English language book of Fujian and Zhejiang woven-arch bridges, plus other covered bridges in Anhui, Hebei, Guangxi, Guizhou, and Sichuan.



Chinese Bridges: Living Architecture from China's Past was published by Tuttle Publishing.

## Rainbows and Centipedes: 20th Century Discoveries of China's 'Lost' Bridges

Ronald G. Knapp

With Photography by A. Chester Ong

It is 75 years since Liang Sicheng (1901-72) "discovered" the Anji ("Safe Crossing") bridge, China's oldest standing bridge and an iconic element in her pantheon of "inventions" and "finds" (Fig. 1). Also called the Zhuoshou bridge after its location in southern Hebei province, the Anji bridge, which was completed in 605, is the world's first open-spandrel segmental arch stone bridge. Liang, China's pioneering architectural historian, viewed the bridge as an "astorishing" and "superb" structure, noting that Zhang Juehuo (665-729), an official and a poet during the Tang dynasty (618-907), reported: "Its construction is so strange that no one knows how it was built" (Liang Sicheng *wenji* [Collected Writings of Liang Sicheng], Beijing, 1982, p. 240). At the time of Liang's visit in 1933, restoration work was taking place and the bridge was still in regular use. There was no boat traffic, however, since the river bed was dry, and crops were planted there instead. On the other hand, an isolated, somewhat faded, photograph taken before 1928 reveals flat-bottomed shallow-draft boat traffic along a stream that was then clearly more than a trickle (Fig. 2). In 1984, when I first visited the bridge, what water was apparent was there only because of nearby damming (Fig. 3); today, the ponded water is used for pleasure craft (Fig. 4). Regrettably, although we celebrate the Anji bridge, we still know little about how it and other ancient bridges in the North China plain fitted into the region's evolving transportation system more than a millennium ago.

Zhang Zuohehuo, another Tang poet, is said to have likened the Anji bridge to "a long rainbow drinking from a mountain stream", and subsequently many other bridges throughout China were also referred to similarly as *hong qiao*, or "rainbow bridges". Even today, the term continues to be used to describe bridges like the Anji bridge that, by the stretch of anyone's imagination, hardly seem, let alone have a rising arc, or that are even multicolored—in other words, a vast range of bridges of different heights, materials and structures.

No bridge carrying the label "rainbow bridge" is better known than the one which provides the visual focus of the handscroll *Qingming shanghe tu* (Along the River During the Qingming Festival), attributed to Zhang Zuohe (1085-1145) (Fig. 5). In the painting, which surfaced in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing in 1954, the bridge appears to be constructed using a system of interconnected logs as a support—a

design that is not seen in any other well-known painting, including what are viewed today as later "copies" of the *Qingming shanghe tu*. In all of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasty copies, the bridge appears clearly to be built of stone. Perhaps the best known example is the 18th century handscroll in the National Palace Museum in Taipei, which is said to have been painted collaboratively by five court artists (Fig. 6). Specialists can easily discern many anachronisms and other misrepresentations in the later scrolls, including southern motifs and details that would not have been



Fig. 1 Anji bridge, 1933  
Zhuo county, Hebei province  
40m  
Length 93.82 m  
(After Liang Sicheng, *Liang Sicheng wenji*, Beijing, 1982, p. 240)



Fig. 2 Anji bridge, before 1928  
(After a displaced image in an exhibition hall)

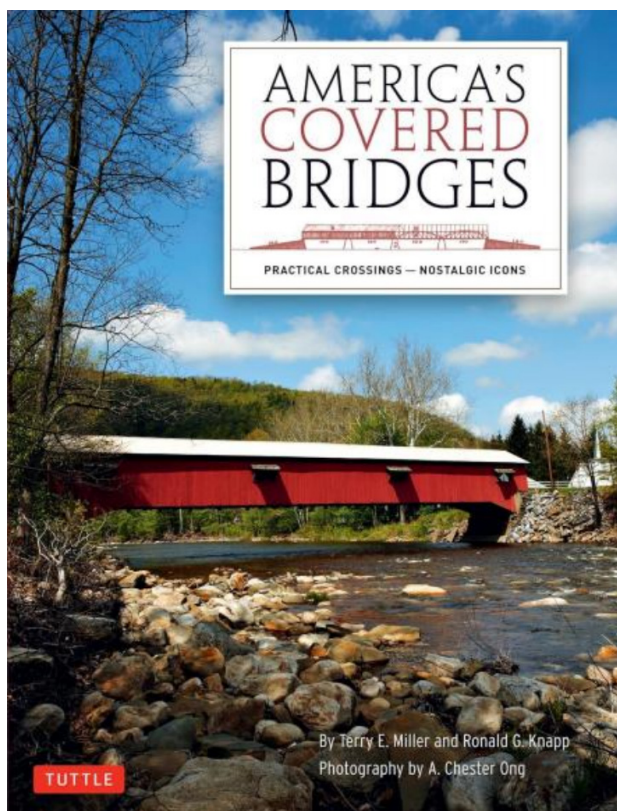
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Knapp's first international article on the subject titled "Rainbows and Centipedes: 20th Century Discoveries of China's 'Lost' Bridges" was published in 2008.

of Zhejiang-Fujian wooden arch covered bridges, establishing formal international academic channels for global publicity.

### 3.2 In-depth Cooperation: Fifteen-year Research Establishing Comprehensive International Research System (2004–2019)

After beginning his new research orientation in 2003, Miller established close academic cooperation with Knapp first with a book titled *America's Covered Bridges: Practical Crossings - Nostalgic Icons* in 2014. Following this important book, which was the first comprehensive book on the subject, they



This is the book *America's Covered Bridges: Practical Crossings - Nostalgic Icons* by Terry E. Miller and Ronald G. Knapp, with photography by A. Chester Ong, published by Tuttle Publishing in 2014.

shifted their focus to China teaming up with Liu Jie, a leading scholar on Chinese covered bridges from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, forming a cross-border and interdisciplinary research group.

Over less than ten years, the team conducted extensive field surveys in core covered bridge concentrated areas of southern Zhejiang and eastern Fujian as well as elsewhere in China, investigating hundreds of well-preserved ancient covered bridges. Massive first-hand field data and image materials were collected regarding architectural forms, traditional craftsmanship, folk sacrificial activities, inheritance status and conservation difficulties, filling Western academic gaps lacking on-

site investigation and authentic data support.

The cross-border cooperation generated remarkable complementary academic strengths. Knapp's historical geography perspective clarified regional evolution, spatial distribution and world-class heritage value of Chinese covered bridges. Miller's cultural anthropology research revealed folk culture and rural social functions behind these structures beyond technical analysis. Chinese scholars' local academic accumulation guaranteed authentic, professional and culturally appropriate research outcomes, avoiding cross-cultural comprehension barriers.

Adopting the research framework combining global vision, Chinese local cases and Sino-Western comparative analysis, the team compared architectural forms, cultural origins, artistic features and evolutionary history of covered bridges in China, Europe, North America and Southeast Asia. They defined the unique status, core advantages and irreplaceable civilization value of Chinese covered bridges among the three major global covered bridge traditions, founding the first complete international research system on Chinese covered bridges.

### 3.3 Achievement Delivery: Groundbreaking Authoritative Monograph Realizing Systematic Global Promotion (2019)

After years of persistent field research and revision, Knapp, Miller and Chinese scholars jointly published *China's Covered Bridges: Architecture Over Water* by Shanghai Jiao Tong



Contrasting covers of the 2019 Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press cover with Fujian's Wan'an Bridge and the University of Hawaii Press cover with Knapp's photograph of Zhejiang's Rulong Bridge.

University Press in 2019. The book was republished by University of Hawaii Press in 2020 with worldwide distribution.

This is the world's first authoritative English monograph specially focusing on Chinese covered bridges, filling long-standing blank space in international systematic research. It sorts



out the historical development of Chinese covered bridges from the Tang and Song dynasties origin, Ming and Qing dynasties prosperity to contemporary inheritance, classifies regional architectural genres, and analyzes wooden structures, intangible craftsmanship, folk culture and artistic value. The work fully presents the integrated value system of technology, art, culture and folk custom of Chinese covered bridges to Western readers.

Supported by substantial field data and cases, the book confirms that China preserves more than 3,000 ancient covered bridges, surpassing European and North American counterparts in quantity, historical depth, structural complexity, craftsmanship level, and cultural richness. In fact, it can now be argued that China's covered bridges represent the oldest, most vigorous, completely inherited, and culturally valuable covered bridge tradition worldwide, revising Western dominant biased viewpoints. The book is scheduled to be translated into German, Spanish and other languages, expanding cultural influence across Europe, America and Belt and Road countries.

After the publication of this book, their article "China's Corridor Bridges: Heritage Buildings over Water" (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s43238-020-00010-w>) in *Built Heritage* journal published by Tongji University is in the top 5% of all research outputs scored by Altmetric.

## **4. Core Value and Far-reaching Significance of the Two Scholars' Researches**

### **4.1 Academic Value: Filling Research Gaps and Restructuring Global Covered Bridge Research Pattern**

Prior to their systematic studies, global covered bridge research was dominated by European and American academic systems with deep regional prejudices and research blind spots. Chinese covered bridge culture was marginalized without due academic attention and value affirmation.

The two scholars incorporated China's covered bridges into mainstream global architectural heritage research through persistent exploration, rigorous argumentation, abundant field data and diversified interdisciplinary perspectives. They ended Western monopoly of academic discourse power, enabling Chinese covered bridges to participate equally in global architectural civilization dialogues.

Their research established an innovative covered bridge research mode featuring global comparison, local exploration, integration of humanity and technology, and combination of history and modernity. It enriches research dimensions of traditional Chinese wooden architecture, optimizes ancient Chinese architectural research system, and provides new reference standards and research directions for global covered

bridge studies. The global research field has evolved from regional European-American focused studies to diversified comparative and inclusive collaborative research, greatly elevating the international academic standing and discourse power of traditional Chinese architecture research.

### **4.2 Communication Value: Eliminating Cultural Barriers and Shaping International Image of Chinese Architectural Culture**

The international promotion of traditional Chinese architectural culture has long been hindered by cultural differences, incompatible discourse systems, insufficient professional translation and cognitive gaps. Numerous precious architectural heritage, ancient craftsmanship and traditional culture fail to gain accurate understanding and worldwide recognition.

As prestigious Western scholars, Knapp and Miller delivered precise, authoritative and internationally accessible interpretation and dissemination of Chinese covered bridge culture with standard academic expressions, effectively breaking cross-cultural communication obstacles.

Independent research and promotion by Western local scholars carry stronger objectivity, authority and persuasiveness. Their academic findings and cultural interpretations are readily accepted by international academia, heritage institutions and the public, reversing stereotyped negative impressions of crude craftsmanship and low value of Chinese folk architecture. The world gains comprehensive understanding of exquisite ancient wooden construction techniques, harmonious architectural philosophy, rural mutual assistance folk tradition and profound Chinese civilization, pioneering new paths and setting fine examples for global dissemination of traditional Chinese architectural culture.

### **4.3 Heritage Conservation Value: Facilitating World Heritage Nomination and Dynamic Cultural Inheritance**

Outstanding Universal Value and authoritative international academic verification are essential prerequisites for World Heritage inscription. Zhejiang-Fujian wooden arch covered bridges especially possess exclusive architectural, historical and cultural value as vivid witnesses of millennial Chinese architectural civilization. Nevertheless, insufficient international academic endorsement and low overseas recognition slowed down its World Heritage application progress.

The two scholars' research results make up for this critical deficiency, providing decisive authoritative academic evidence and defining its unique world-class heritage value, serving as core theoretical support for the World Heritage nomination of Zhejiang-Fujian wooden arch covered bridges.

Their decades-long research and global publicity enhance public awareness of the rarity, preciousness, and endangered



status of Chinese covered bridges, driving improved restoration, conservation, inheritance and revitalization mechanisms nationwide. The intangible cultural heritage of traditional covered bridge construction craftsmanship achieves dynamic inheritance and innovative development. These efforts protect distinctive regional cultural heritage and establish Chinese covered bridges as vital windows showcasing Chinese civilization and narrating Chinese cultural stories globally.

#### 4.4 Cultural Exchange Value: Building Bridges for Sino-foreign Architectural Cultural Dialogue

Fifteen years of steady cross-border academic cooperation established a sound model for in-depth equal Sino-foreign architectural cultural exchanges and mutual learning. Based on pure academic research, Knapp and Miller discarded cultural prejudices and estrangement, building regular communication platforms for Chinese and American architects, heritage conservation organizations and cultural researchers, promoting diversified integration and two-way learning in traditional architecture research, heritage protection and folk culture inheritance.

Their academic practices prove that traditional Chinese architectural culture is not isolated regional civilization but an indispensable splendid component of global architectural civilization. It sets an excellent model for equal dialogue and integrated development of Sino-foreign traditional cultures, continuously boosting international influence and cultural soft power of China.

### 5. Conclusion

Ronald G. Knapp and Terry E. Miller are two authoritative Western scholars dedicated to Chinese covered bridge research and global cultural promotion, as well as my respected long-time overseas friends. Dedicating their lifelong careers to studying and popularizing Chinese covered bridge culture, they successfully elevated Chinese *langqiao* (“corridor ridges”) from obscure local relics to world-famous cultural treasures.

From Knapp’s pioneering research opening international recognition in 2008 to the release of the world’s first authoritative English monograph on Chinese covered bridges in



Taken on September 21, 2019 in Qingyuan, Zhejiang Province: Wang Qijun, the author of this article, stands on the left; Ronald G. Knapp in the middle; and photographer Li Yuxiang on the right. Ronald G. Knapp and Li Yuxiang first met in the 1980s. They have maintained a decades-long friendship ever since.

2019, the two scholars filled global systematic research vacancies and restructured the overall pattern of international covered bridge studies with interdisciplinary visions, sincere cross-border cooperation and rigorous academic attitudes.

Their academic achievements provide core theoretical support for World Heritage application, architectural heritage preservation and traditional craftsmanship inheritance of Chinese covered bridges. Professional and objective international discourse eliminates Western prejudices against traditional Chinese architecture and accelerates global recognition of fine traditional Chinese architectural culture.

Although Terry E. Miller has passed away, his joint research achievements, cultural communication bridges and Sino-foreign friendship established with Ronald G. Knapp remains everlasting. Their cross-cultural communication experience offers valuable references for contemporary overseas promotion of Chinese traditional culture and Sino-foreign cultural exchanges, demonstrating the vital driving force of academic research in international cultural dissemination. The sincere affection and selfless contributions the two scholars devoted to Chinese culture will be forever remembered by Sino-foreign academic circles.

**Note:** All images in this article are provided by Ronald G. Knapp.

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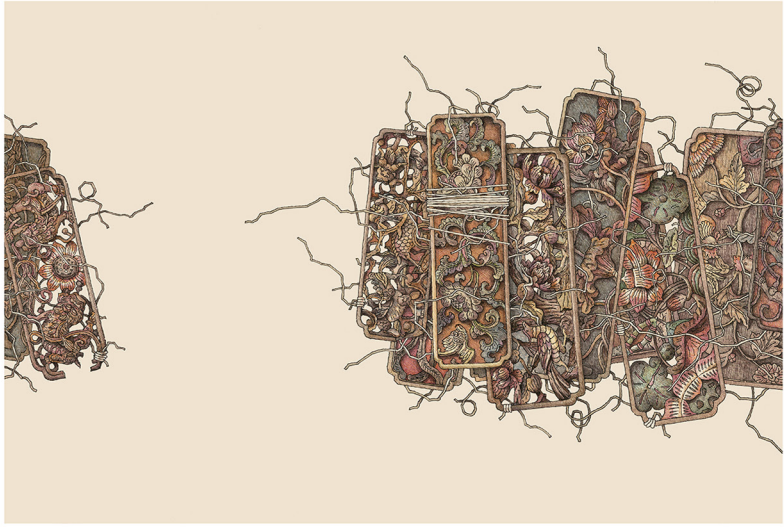




HONGFU MYANMAR NO.2, 40CM × 50CM

Water-based Markers by Keliang Xia





*CRAFTSMANSHIP BUILDS DREAMS*, 28 CM x 42 CM x 4 CM

Signing pen by Keliang Xia





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