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On the Yasheng Plastic Arts of Roof Ridge of Guanyue Temple in Quanzhou

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Abstract: In the context of the continuous evolution of architecture and the rich diversity of folk cultures, the Yasheng culture embedded in Chinese traditional architecture has gradually come into the public eye and received extensive attention. Historically, there has been relatively little research on people's understanding of the Yasheng elements on the roof ridges of Quanzhou Guanyue Temple. The profound cultural connotations deeply rooted in religious beliefs, traditional aesthetics, and the wisdom of the ancients, as well as the important symbolic significance of these elements in representing the spiritual sustenance of the local community, require further exploration. To effectively address these issues, this study adopts a comprehensive research approach. It not only conducts in-depth literature reviews, thoroughly examining academic papers, historical records, and monographs related to architecture and cultural studies, but also carries out meticulous field investigations. This paper first clearly defines the concept of Yasheng in the architectural context, categorizes its various forms such as sculptures, carvings, and decorative patterns, and analyzes their diverse manifestations. Subsequently, it comprehensively examines the overall layout, architectural style, and historical background of Quanzhou Guanyue Temple. Then, it delves into the complex craftsmanship and unique design of the Yasheng elements on the roof ridges, exploring the cultural significance behind the distinctive designs of related structures from multiple perspectives, including cultural anthropology, art history, and architectural semiotics. This research can not only deepen the understanding of the traditional architectural culture in southern Fujian but also promote the research on the Yasheng elements on the roof ridges of Quanzhou Guanyue Temple, contributing to the sustainable development of Chinese traditional architectural culture in modern society.

Keywords: Yasheng, Quanzhou Guanyue Temple, Roofing

Introduction

Famous architect Ieoh Ming Pei once remarked, "Architecture is alive. Although it is solidified, it embodies humanistic ideas." As a crucial connotation of architecture, cultural heritage carries the wisdom and emotions of our ancestors and is an invaluable and non-renewable asset. Similarly, Liang Sicheng emphasized, "Both the arrogance and inferiority of a nation stem from ignorance of its own historical culture. Only by understanding our past can we stand on an objective stance and develop deep-seated national self-esteem." Protecting cultural heritage is to safeguard the roots and memories of our nation. Among them, Yasheng is generally applied in the sphere of traditional national architecture and has lengthy history in terms of culture. But as China's urbanization picks speed and urban construction develops quickly, the living area of traditional ethnic dwellings has been compressed and the culture of winning-weariness runs the danger of either being lost or destroyed.

The Yasheng depicted on the roof of Tonghuai Guanyue Temple in Quanzhou (hereinafter referred to as "Guanyue Temple in Quanzhou" or "Guanyue Temple") possesses distinctive artistic significance, and the cultural implications it embodies, including the pursuit of good fortune and the avoidance of malevolence, as well as the prayers for happiness and auspiciousness, are intricately linked to the spiritual essence of national culture. This dissertation aims to thoroughly investigate the Yasheng at Guanyue Temple in Quanzhou and to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the relevant materials concerning Yasheng and the architecture of Guanyue Temple through literature review and field research. A comprehensive examination of the origins, progression, evolution, and cultural implications of Yasheng in national architecture can enhance the understanding of its cultural value and furnish robust theoretical support for the preservation, restoration, and transmission of national architecture, thereby fostering the flourishing and advancement of national culture in the contemporary era and aiding the realization of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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1. Literature Review

The term “Yasheng” first appeared in the literatures of the Han Dynasty. Essentially, it is a kind of folk witchcraft belief behavior, which suppresses evil forces through means such as curses. It originates from the ancient people's awe of natural and supernatural forces [1]. Wu Chengguo believed that during the Six Dynasties, the practice of Yasheng prevailed and permeated all aspects of social life, including politics, military affairs, and people's daily lives [2]. Scholars such as Li Shiwu discovered through the study of craftsmen's house-building witchcraft that its original form was similar to the early Yasheng behavior, indicating that the Yasheng culture is closely connected with folk production and daily life [3].

Yasheng embodies the social psychology and cultural beliefs of a specific period, with the core purpose of praying for blessings and avoiding disasters. As the material carrier of witchcraft beliefs, Yasheng objects contain traditional philosophical thoughts such as the theory of yin-yang and the five elements, and the theory of geomancy. They have unique symbolic meanings and cultural values, and are of great significance in studying the national cultural psychology and other aspects.

Wu Yongxin's research found that architectural decoration elements such as chiwen (the ornament on the roof ridge) and baoding (the top ornament of a building) reflect the concept of Yasheng. For example, chiwen is believed to ward off fires, and baoding expresses the wish for the safety of the building [4]. An article on the folk religious beliefs of the Bai ethnic group constructs a “multi-dimensional and three-dimensional” family-protection system using various symbols [5]. The horse-head walls of Huizhou architecture not only have practical functions such as fire-prevention and wind-prevention, but also have the meaning of expelling evil spirits and attracting blessings in local folk concepts, reflecting the integration of regional architectural culture and folk culture [6]. In folk customs, there is a certain degree of integration between Taoist and Buddhist elements. In the relevant practical customs, Yasheng elements are widely used. Taoist talismans and Buddhist ritual objects are endowed with special powers and meanings in religious ceremonies, reflecting the absorption and transformation of folk Yasheng culture by religious culture, and enriching the connotations and functions of religious ceremonies. In folk arts such as paper-cutting, embroidery, and wood-carving, patterns symbolizing auspiciousness and expelling evil spirits often appear. Through artistic processing, these patterns strengthen the dissemination and inheritance of Yasheng culture in the folk, and become an indispensable part of folk art, passing down from generation to generation and continuing the national cultural memory.

Although current research on Yasheng has achieved certain results, there are still limitations. In terms of research methods, the integration of multiple disciplines is not in-depth enough, and a systematic research paradigm has not been formed. In terms of research scope, most research focuses on the Central Plains region and mainstream culture, paying little attention to the Yasheng phenomena in ethnic minority areas and remote regions, leaving obvious research gaps. In the future, interdisciplinary research on Yasheng should be strengthened, and the research scope should be expanded. By deeply exploring the Yasheng culture in different regions and ethnic groups, we can improve our understanding of this ancient culture, contribute to the inheritance and development of excellent traditional Chinese culture, and provide a unique perspective and rich materials for cross-cultural research.

2. Methodology

This study comprehensively utilizes the methods of literature review and field research to delve deeply into the Yasheng-inspired forms on the roof ridges of the Quanzhou Guanyue Temple and their cultural connotations.

By examining and analyzing *Shuowen Jiezi* and the annotations of scholars such as Xu Kai, the study traces the etymology of Yasheng, clarifying its fundamental meaning as a form of witchcraft that inflicts harm on others or subdues deities through mysterious means. Meanwhile, it extensively peruses multidisciplinary works. For instance, it refers to Zhu Lei's *An Examination of the Astronomical Origins of the Beidou Yasheng Belief* to explore the religious and cultural background of Yasheng, and draws on Xu Jingbin's *A Brief Discussion on 'Yasheng Coins' and the Culture of Auspicious Selection* to understand the manifestations of Yasheng in folk customs. Based on this, by integrating historical records, academic achievements, and local chronicles, the study categorizes Yasheng objects from two dimensions: purpose and attribute. In terms of purpose, it analyzes Yasheng coins, Shi Gandang, and related customs in the *Lu Ban Jing*. In terms of attribute, it classifies Yasheng objects into two types: biological and non-biological. By incorporating Taoist literature such as Tao Hongjing's *Zhen'Gao* and local chronicles like the Qianlong-edition *Quanzhou Fuzhi*, it expounds on their applications in folk beliefs.

In the field research, the Quanzhou Tonghuai Guanyue Temple is chosen as the research area. Situated on Tumen Street, Licheng District, Quanzhou City, the temple was initially constructed in the Song Dynasty. After multiple renovations, it has a total floor area of 1,294 square meters. It was designated as a cultural relic protection unit in

Quanzhou City in 1992 and in Fujian Province in 2005. With its large scale, well-preserved condition, and rich cultural connotations, it serves as an ideal sample for studying Yasheng phenomena in traditional architecture.

The author conducts a comprehensive on-site investigation of the temple complex, meticulously documenting the temple layout such as the “Three-Bay Arrangement” of the three halls (Sanyi Hall, Wucheng Hall, and Chongxian Hall), as well as architectural styles like the brick-wood composite structure and the Xieshan roof covered with red tubular tiles. The author pays particular attention to the roof, where Yasheng phenomena are intensively presented. Each part of the roof ridge, including the roof-ridge finial, ridge ornaments, Xishi ridge, ridge-end wall, and yindou, is carefully observed and described. The author records the roof-ridge decoration technique of Jianci (broken-porcelain mosaic sculpture) used to create images of auspicious figures, animals, and plants. By taking photos to record the details of Yasheng objects such as Jianci-crafted dragons, flowers, and birds, like the different postures of the Green Dragons and the front-facing seated dragon on the roof-ridge protective finials, and by drawing sketches to illustrate the spatial relationships and overall composition of the roof-ridge decorations, the author aids in the analysis of the artistic and cultural significance of Yasheng objects.

In terms of interpreting symbolic meanings, the author elucidates the symbolic significance of Yasheng objects based on local cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and historical documents. For example, the orb-shaped roof-ridge finial inspired by the Buddhist Mani Pearl is associated with the Buddhist concepts of purity and auspiciousness. Besides its symbolic meaning of bringing good luck and expelling evil, the dragon-shaped roof-ridge protective finial is analyzed from the perspective of architectural function in terms of its role in increasing the weight of the roof ridge and resisting typhoons.

Through integrating the findings of the literature review and field research, this study endeavors to comprehensively understand the origin, manifestations, cultural connotations of the Yasheng phenomena in the architecture of the Quanzhou Guanyue Temple, as well as its significance in national architecture and culture.

3. Description of Study Area

Quanzhou Guanyue Temple is located on Tumen Street, Licheng District, Quanzhou City, Fujian Province. Facing south, it enjoys a superior geographical location and is one of the most representative temples in Quanzhou. Situated in the core cultural area of the city, it is surrounded by numerous historical relics and traditional residential houses, bearing witness to the glorious history of Quanzhou as an important node on the Maritime Silk Road.

The architecture of Quanzhou Guanyue Temple is unique, integrating the traditional architectural techniques of southern Fujian and diverse cultural elements. Its exquisite wood carving, stone carving, brick carving and other decorative arts demonstrate the superb skills of southern Fujian craftsmen. In particular, the roof decoration of the temple adopts traditional techniques such as porcelain-cutting sculpture, which is colorful and vivid, making it an excellent sample for studying the traditional architectural decoration art of southern Fujian.

Secondly, Quanzhou Guanyue Temple bears profound folk belief culture. Guan Yu and Yue Fei enshrined in the temple are regarded as incarnations of loyalty and righteousness and are widely revered by the people. During important festivals, a large number of believers come to worship, and the temple is filled with strong incense. This rich folk belief atmosphere provides a rich social and cultural soil for studying the relationship between folk beliefs and Yasheng objects.

The reasons for choosing Quanzhou Guanyue Temple as the research object of Yasheng objects are as follows. Firstly, the temple has a long history and rich cultural connotations, resulting in abundant Yasheng-shaped expressions on its roof, which contain a great deal of Yasheng-related cultural information. Secondly, the high popularity and wide social influence of Guanyue Temple endow the research results with stronger representativeness and promotion value, contributing to a deeper understanding of the role and significance of Yasheng objects in folk beliefs.

4. Overview of Yasheng and Yasheng Culture

In Xu Shen’s *Shuowen Jiezi*, “Ya” is elucidated as “bamboo or reed mat used in building a house”, and Xu Kai, a commentator of the Southern Tang Dynasty, additionally translated it as “be repressed”, wherein the term “Yan” be pronounced as “yā”, associated with “pressure” and including connotations such as overturning, fitting, constraining, obstructing, hiding, and suppressing. In *Shuowen Jiezi*, the term “Sheng” originally denotes the odor of dog paste, and it is also interpreted as “unfamiliar”. In the context of daily use and architecture, “Sheng” frequently conveys standard meanings such as “triumph” and “success”. In the phrase “Yasheng”, the term “Ya” is collocated with “Sheng”. “Yasheng” denotes witchcraft that accomplishes the objective of inflicting calamity upon others or subjugating spirits and deities by enigmatic methods. In this context, “Sheng” conveys the dual meanings of triumph and oppression, a

nuanced interpretation arising from cultural evolution. The term “Yasheng” initially emerged in *The Biography of Hanshu: The Biography of Wang Mang, Part Two*. Wang Mang made a Weidou (a kind of vessel with special symbolic meaning in ancient times); to instill revulsion in the soldiers, he employed the apotropaic approach associated with the Big Dipper [7].

The object of Yasheng is a significant component of the culture of Yasheng, which pertains to artifacts imbued with the characteristic of Yasheng. It can be categorized based on purpose and attribute. Based on the intent of the activity, there is a repression of Numismatic Charms [8]. Shi Gandang, if fatigued by the financial gains derived from the homophony of “Sui” (岁 means year) and “Sui” (祟, means evil spirit), embraces the connotation of exorcising spirits and communities; Shi Gandang assumes a formidable stance in the streets to repel malevolent entities. There exist artisans who have inflicted calamities upon others, shown by the custom of interring particular objects to induce unrest in the employer’s residence during construction, as documented in the *Lu Ban Jing*. Carpenter Yasheng figures, including wind lions and door gods, are ubiquitous throughout the structure [9]. Regarding characteristics, there exist two categories of entities: biotic and abiotic organisms. Biological aversion pertains to living organisms, including animals and plants. Tao Hongjing, a Taoist monk during the Southern Dynasties, stated in *Zhen’Gao* that “white chickens and white dogs should be maintained in the mountains of Taoist study to repel malevolent spirits”. It can be conjectured that white chickens and white dogs should be regarded as objects of animal aversion according to folk Yasheng objects. The Qianlong edition of *Quanzhou Fuzhi* states: “Extinguish the fire; a cactus resembling a human hand can be planted in pots on the premises to avert fire hazards.” In the Jinmen region of Quanzhou, residents cultivate cacti in standard flowerpots or ceramic containers, positioning them on the courtyard door wall or zhaobi, since they believe that the thorns of the cactus can repel malevolent spirits. The aforementioned non-biological items include stone lions, peach symbols, bagua mirrors, and door gods [10]. The object of Yasheng is prevalent in life, akin to door deities and rumor cards. Its significance resides not in its shape, but in the amalgamation of symbolic meaning and the impact of triumph fatigue, serving as a conduit for the expression of faith.

The Yasheng culture including Yasheng ritual and the object of Yasheng. The Yasheng ritual can serve to “exorcise evil spirits” or imbue objects with Yasheng attributes through gestures, music, singing, incantations, implements, fire, water, and other tools, facilitated by a distinct “magical” procedure. The culture of Yasheng encompasses folk beliefs, is prevalent in traditional life and architecture, and has significantly influenced individuals’ spiritual lives and lifestyles throughout history.

5. Manifestations of Yasheng in Field of Architecture

The Yasheng is primarily manifested in the building’s exterior, which embodies and performs significant traditional cultural functions. Typically, a “Shi Gandang” is situated along main thoroughfares, village entrances, and bridges, manifested as bas-reliefs or round carvings, adorned with lion and tiger heads or intricate patterns to dispel the “T-shaped evil spirit”. (“T-shaped Evil Spirit” denotes a superstitious notion found in specific traditional beliefs, including Feng Shui. A layout resembling the letter “T” is seen to have an inauspicious impact, potentially resulting in bad luck, misfortunes, or negative energy for the surrounding surroundings or individuals involved.) It serves to repel wind, provide waterproofing, exorcise malevolent entities, and halt their influence. Additionally, the roof features the Feng-shih-yeh [11], beast heads (such as “Owl”-like Roof Ornament). The majority of Feng-shih-yeh consist of red bricks or clay sculptures depicting warriors mounted on lions, originating from the incarnation of the deity of war, Chiyou, believed to pacify winds and repel malevolent spirits. The animal heads are positioned at both ends of the roof, designed to represent a fire in Yongzheng; furthermore, there are Bagua cards, animal cards, and Shanhai-Zhen (Mountain-and-Sea-themed Architectural Amulet) depicted on the lintel. The Bagua cards are inscribed with Tai Chi and Bagua-xiang (The Eight-Trigram Representations in Geomantic Omen) to ward off malevolent spirits. The animal cards predominantly feature lions discharging their swords to banish malevolent spirits. Shanhai-Zhen is a square or circular wooden board artwork or mirror painting designed to banish and convey numerous malevolent spirits. Images of door gods, such as Qin Qiong, Weichi Gong, and Yu Lei shentu, are affixed to the entrance to ensure familial safety; Swallow mouths, predominantly in the form of distorted tiger heads, are installed on the wall to repel malevolent spirits. Diverse forms and auspicious artifacts are adeptly incorporated into the building’s general design, enhancing its artistic beauty while embodying people’s aspirations for an improved life. This paper examines the objects situated on the roof of the Southern Fujian building as the initial focus.

Jianci (Broken-Porcelain Mosaic Sculpture) is frequently employed on the roofs of southern Fujian, primarily with motifs of people, animals, plants, and other distinct imagery themes. (Jianci: Porcelain-cutting sculpture, a unique architectural decoration craft popular in southern Fujian of Fujian Province, Chaoshan area of Guangdong Province, and Taiwan region. It integrates various arts such as clay sculpture, painting, and carving.) The production of figure modeling primarily relies on kneading. The majority of the figures are hollowed to diminish the roof’s weight. The elevated roof shape enhances visibility; thus, the figure is characterized by a “short body and long legs, devoid of eyes,

beads, and a defined front or back”. Additionally, the skin of the figure retains its original embryonic hue, while only the clothing, hair, and accessories are vividly colored to enhance their aesthetic appeal. Animal modeling is categorized into three types: legendary, wild, and domesticated. Mythical creatures, including the octopus, one of the nine dragon offspring, are typically positioned at both extremities of the principal ridge on the roof to symbolize the act of expelling water and consuming fire [12]. To safeguard the structure against fire. Wild animals including bats, lions, and urasian Siskins. Domesticated animals predominantly coexist in modeling scenarios, including monkeys, peacocks, and deer. And plant modeling, including grass scroll patterns and floral patterns. The grass scroll pattern consists of pomegranate, lotus, seaweed, and more motifs, which are simplified and amalgamated into an uninterrupted elongated decorative design, subsequently curved into segments. The floral motifs primarily consist of pine, bamboo, plum, orchid, chrysanthemum, lotus, and pomegranate.

6. Artifact of Yasheng atop Guanyue Temple in Quanzhou

The Quanzhou Guanyue Temple is situated on Tumen Street in the Licheng District of Quanzhou City, Fujian Province. It is widely recognized as Tumen Guandi Temple. It was established during the Song Dynasty. It was renamed in the third year of the Republic of China (1914) in honor of the veneration of Yuefei, with a total building area of 1, 294 square meters. It is the greatest extant martial temple in Fujian Province [13]. Guanyue Temple was approved as a cultural relic protection unit in Quanzhou City in 1992, and was designated as a provincial-level cultural relic protection unit in 2005 [14]. The entire temple is oriented southward and comprises three halls: Sanyi Hall, Wucheng Hall, and Chongxian Hall, each featuring Three-Bay Arrangement. (Along the central axis, there are three courtyards arranged sequentially from front to back, typically separated by doors or walls. The author believes that the main buildings of Quanzhou Guanyue Temple consist of three main halls, which are three parallel “Shuangluocuo”. Therefore, in the following text, the roof ridges of different parts will be distinguished as “upper-tier” and “lower-tier”.) The part of the last row has been transformed into a three-storey building with an integrated structure. It adopts a hybrid structure of brick and wood, with a Xieshan roof (a kind of Chinese traditional roof style with a sloping and double-eaved design). The roof is paved with red tubular tiles. The structure predominantly draws from the old architectural style of southern Fujian, featuring intricate wood carvings, stone carvings, clay sculptures, and several other embellishments. The roof features porcelain dragons in various shapes, accompanied by flowers, birds, and animals. Quanzhou Guanyue Temple, a quintessential example of religious architecture in southern Fujian, embodies distinctive local cultural significance and aesthetic principles in its craftsmanship and design.

The term “house” first denoted the roof, but over time, it developed to symbolize the entire dwelling. Influenced by the traditional Chinese concepts of “respecting heaven and fearing god” and the notion that “the divine world” supersedes “the human world”, individuals typically construct temple roofs, the apex of the structure, to be more grandiose and elaborate than those of residential buildings, with greater ornamental embellishments [15]. In traditional architecture, the roof ridge encompasses several distinct parts. The roof-ridge finial, located at the highest point in the center, has a unique shape and serves as a prominent marker on the roof ridge. On both sides, symmetrically distributed, are the ridge ornaments, which add aesthetic appeal and artistic sense to the roof ridge. The wider part below is the Xishi ridge, which is richly decorated. The area beneath the Xishi ridge is the ridge-end wall, which may be adorned with various patterns or shapes. At the two ends of the roof ridge, where it connects with the hip-rafters and protrudes beyond the gable wall, is the yindou (seal-shaped block), a unique component in the roof-ridge structure. (Table 1, Figure 1)

Hall Name		Sanyi Hall	Wucheng Hall	Chongxian Hall
Roof Position				
Roof-ridge finial	Drop	Jewel-like orb		
	Roof fall	Aquarius		
Roof-ridge Protective Finial	Drop	Qinglong walking dragon	Yinglong Front-facing Seated Dragon, Qinglong descending dragon, Qinglong ascending dragon	Qinglong walking dragon
	Roof fall	Qinglong descending dragon	Yinglong walking dragon, Qinglong descending dragon	Qinglong descending dragon
Ridge-end Wall		Flowers, birds,	Dragons, gourds, banana fans,	Flowers, birds, horses,

	horses, lion, back pattern	horses, flowers, waves	Kirin, zigzag patterns
Paitou	Shuihuliangshan	Embroidered pictures of eight immortals	Shuihuliangshan

Table 1 Guanyue Temple Roof Decoration Modeling

Table source: self-drawn by the author

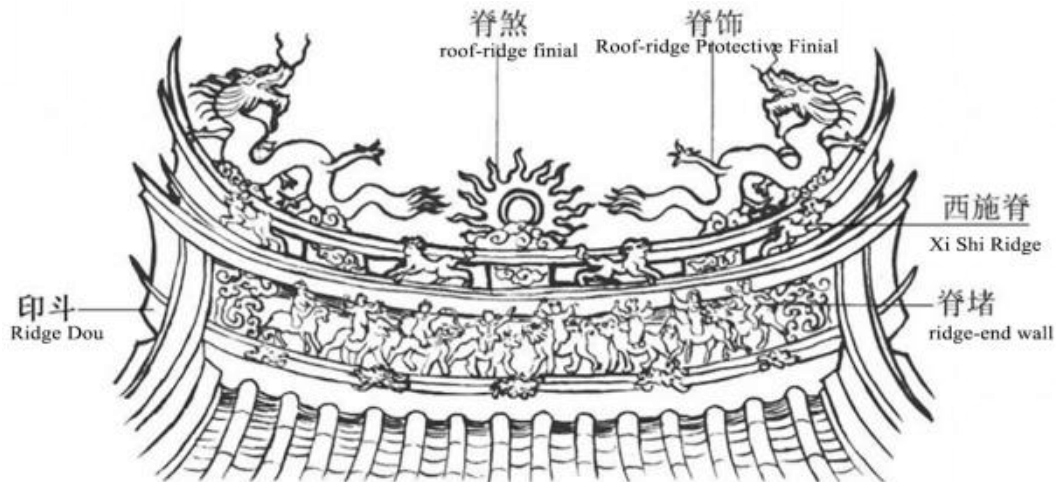


Fig. 1 Schematic Diagram of the Roof-ridge Area

Image source: G. Xiyan, “Roof with Theatrical Performances”, Fujian Normal University, vol. 11, p. 257, Jun. 2021.

The roof of Guanyue Temple is covered with red tubular tiles, green glazed floral finials, and pendent pearls. The roof ridges are richly decorated and magnificent, adorned with various auspicious flowers, animals, and figures. These adornments embody people’s beautiful expectations for religious buildings and also represent one of the manifestations of the “artisan’s warding-off practices” mentioned previously. Due to the complex ridge decorations, the facade of Guanyue Temple presents a distinct rhythm of “dense, sparse, dense, sparse” from top to bottom, making the roof ridges a key area of the overall plastic arts (Figure 2).

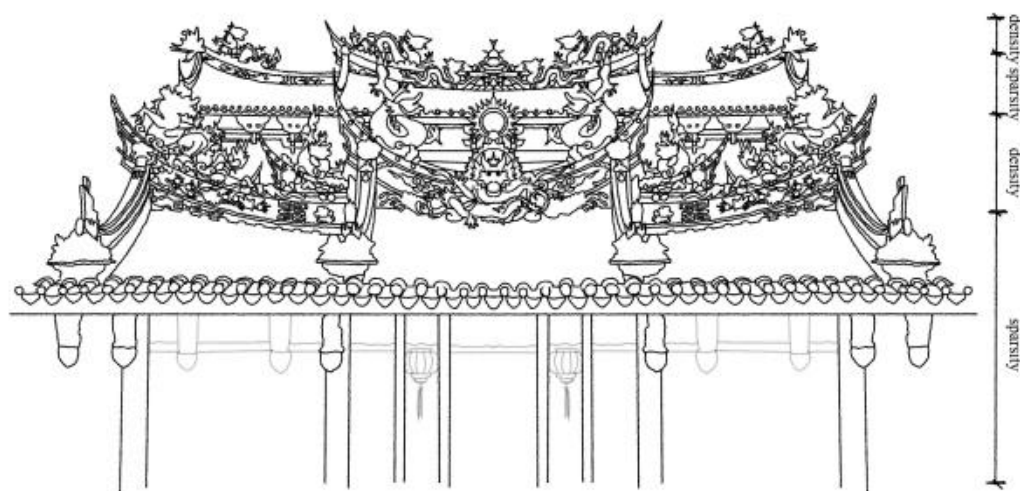


Fig. 2 Elevation of the front part of Guanyue Temple’s viewpoint.

Image source: self-painted by the author

The roof ridges of Guanyue Temple are shaped using the porcelain-cutting technique. The porcelain-cutting technique uses various ceramics with bright colors and fragile structures as raw materials. Tools such as scissors and putty knives are used to skillfully trim these ceramics into small porcelain pieces of different shapes and sizes. Then, on the basis of the stucco-molded body, various shapes are sculpted by inlaying the porcelain pieces (Figure 3). According to the principle of perceptual closure, although the boundaries of color blocks are blurred when viewing the various shapes composed of fragmented porcelain pieces up close, when observed from the ground, these shapes still appear vivid, exquisite, and their forms are clearly recognizable. (The Principle of Perceptual Closure: An important concept in Gestalt psychology. It renders incomplete figures complete. Its core lies in the simple interpretation of visual information and reflects the tendency of people to integrate elements into an entirety.) Cut-porcelain carving, which is inlaid with a large number of small porcelain pieces and glimmers under the light, is also known as “dǎ huǒ xīng” [16]. It is believed to have the function of dispelling evil spirits and warding off malevolence. It has been thriving in the Chaoshan region, and “Jianci (Broken-Porcelain Mosaic Sculpture) Yasheng objects” can be seen in ancestral temples throughout southern Fujian.



Fig. 3 Jianci(Broken-Porcelain Mosaic Sculpture)

Image source: Zhangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism. (2016, April 22). The Jianci Carving in Dongshan Island: A Beauty Not to Be Missed. *WeChat*. Retrieved from https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Y581Jv-Hp-PT-dKwDw_FJg [Accessed: 2024, April 25]

(A) Object of Yasheng of Main Temple Roof

The main ridge of Guanyue Temple is curved, and the ridge angles are upturned, resulting in a relatively large degree of curvature of the main ridge. Thus, it overcomes the stiffness of the main ridge visually and appears more dynamic. The eaves-end ridges of Guanyue Temple are all orb-shaped roof-ridge finial, composed of elements such as fire beads, phoenixes, peonies, gourds, moiré patterns, and fish patterns, all symbolizing good luck. The prototype is the Mani Pearl in Buddhism. The end-of-roof ridges are all vase-shaped roof-ridge finials, symbolizing peace and good luck (Figure 4). This kind of ornamentation is mainly used in religious buildings. Its shape is symmetrical and solemn, containing profound meanings of praying for blessings and showing reverence. From an architectural perspective, people tend to choose objects with novelty, complexity, and dynamism. Therefore, the visual outline of the roof ridges of Guanyue Temple, with its rich line contours, can attract the viewers' attention first when observed from a certain distance.



Fig. 4 Roof shape of Guanyue Temple

Image source: self-painted by the author

The design of the roof-ridge protective finial components is as follows (Figure 5): The roof-ridge protective finial of the Central Wucheng Hall consists of a descending Qinglong and an ascending Qinglong. The porcelain carving of the sitting dragon is located right beneath the precious pearl. (Figure 6) The top-end protective brake features a Ying Long in walking posture and a descending Qinglong. The front-facing seated dragon, sometimes called the “upright dragon”, means that the dragon’s head faces the front, directly facing the viewer. There is always a fireball behind the chin of the seated dragon. The dragon’s body coils upward and then curves downward in an arc, with its four claws stretching out in all directions, maintaining an upright overall posture. The composition of the sitting dragon is the most upright among all dragon patterns and is used only in the most prominent positions. The front of Guanyue Temple is adorned with Jianci of the sitting dragon, which not only demonstrates the sanctity and solemnity of the building but also serves as a warding-off measure against evil spirits. Both the Sanyi Hall and the Chongxian Hall have a walking Qinglong as the lower-end roof-ridge protective finial, and a descending Qinglong at the top-end. The auspicious symbol of the dragon ^[17] has been repeatedly strengthened in traditional culture, forming a collective memory. The dragon-shaped protective brake not only implies the pursuit of good fortune and the avoidance of misfortune but also helps to increase the weight of the roof ridge and resist typhoons.

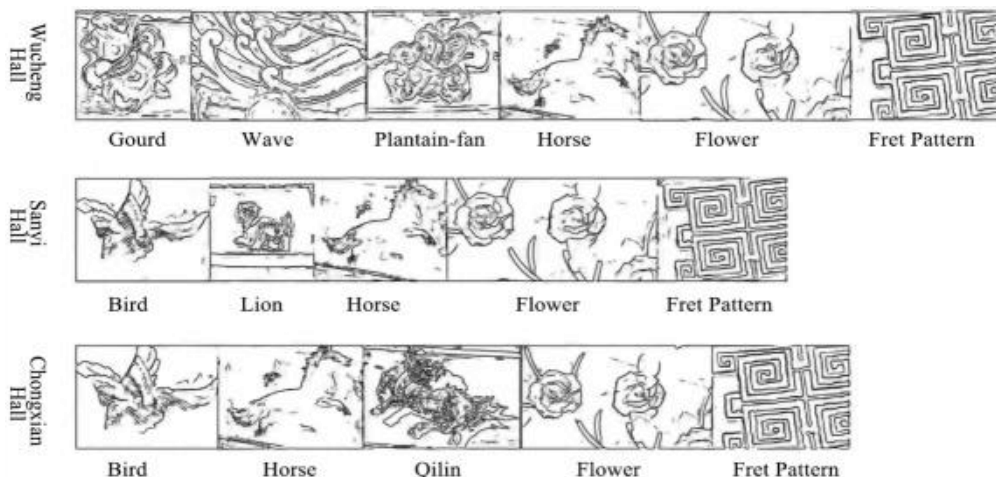


Fig. 5 Decorative elements on ridge-end walls

Image source: self-painted by the author



Fig. 6 Shape of the Falling Roof of Guanyue Temple

Image source: self-painted by the author

In Minnan traditional architecture, the ridge-end wall is constructed with multiple layers, and an additional ridge is added, which is called the “Xi Shi Ridge”. This provides ample space for elaborate porcelain inlays. On the Xi Shi Ridge of Guanyue Temple, numerous floral, plant, and auspicious animal motifs are used, such as birds, unicorns, and peonies. The plant-shaped sculptures on the ridge-end wall unfold gracefully, with an artful balance of density and sparsity. The animal-shaped sculptures, some galloping and some spreading their wings, exude a sense of elegance and

ease, creating a visually dynamic and relaxed effect. The terminal part of the roof ridge of Guanyue Temple, that is, the upturned parts at both ends of the main ridge, is a typical “dovetail ridge”^[18] commonly seen in southern Fujian. The two ends are raised like bows, and the pointed ends fork like swallowtails. The ridge tail is decorated with multicolored curly grass and spray-like patterns. The ridge-mounted ornamental zoomorphic finial (specifically, the kissing-beast-like decoration) on the roof of the three-story building behind the main hall is in the shape of an ascending Qinglong. It is located at the highest point of the temple roof, stretching towards the sky. Among them, the Ridge Dou (Ridge Dou is a unique component on the roof ridges of traditional Chinese architecture.) is located at the lower end of the ridge tail, protruding from the gable wall and connecting with the hip ridge. The Ridge Dou on the roof of Guanyue Temple is in the color of camellia.

Although the vertical crest, (The vertical crest also known as the gauge belt, is a ridge strip that hangs vertically along the tiles on the roof. In the Minnan, Chaoshan and Taiwan regions, the vertical crests of temples have no ridge beasts but are decorated with text patterns. The vertical crests are usually stacked in layers and have a curved, upturned shape.) often referred to as the gauge belt, has fewer warding-off objects, at the end of the vertical crest, numerous scenes from dramas or folk tales are piled up, such as “The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea”^[19] and scenes from “Water Margin”. Among the folk-tale scenes, the frequently used porcelain-cutting theme is “The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea”. The Eight Immortals embody China’s auspicious perspectives in many aspects, and their appearance represents the secularization of Taoism.

(B) Warding-off Objects on Roof Ridges of Ancillary Buildings

Ancillary buildings include the office building and the Tonghuai Cultural Center. The office building is located behind the main hall and was renovated from the third-courtyard part. The Tonghuai Cultural Center is on the right side of the three main halls. (Due to the fact that the roof-ridge style of the Tonghuai Cultural Center is highly similar to that of the main hall and many tourists take pictures of the Tonghuai Cultural Center as part of the Guanyue Temple scenic spot when visiting. Thus, Tonghuai Cultural Center can be regarded as an ancillary building of the Guanyue Temple.) On the roof ridge of the office building, there is a vase-shaped roof-ridge finial in the middle as a object of Yasheng, and below it is a design of “Carp Leaping over the Dragon Gate”, with layers of red and blue water waves beneath the “Dragon Gate”. “Carp Leaping over the Dragon Gate” holds profound meanings of opportunity, wealth, and the pursuit of a better life among the people. In addition, from the theoretical perspectives of architectural aesthetics and visual psychology, the office building plays a crucial role in the overall architectural layout of the Guanyue Temple and forms the highest level of the frontal view of the Guanyue Temple. The three-story roof ridge serves as a visual focal point, breaking the relatively uniform height levels of traditional temple architecture. Through its ascending design, it creates a rhythmic visual cadence. In the viewer’s visual experience, this change in roof-ridge levels from low to high guides the line of sight to move upward gradually, thus making the Guanyue Temple present a more magnificent and luxurious visual image as a whole and strengthening the religious sanctity of the building. (Figure 7)

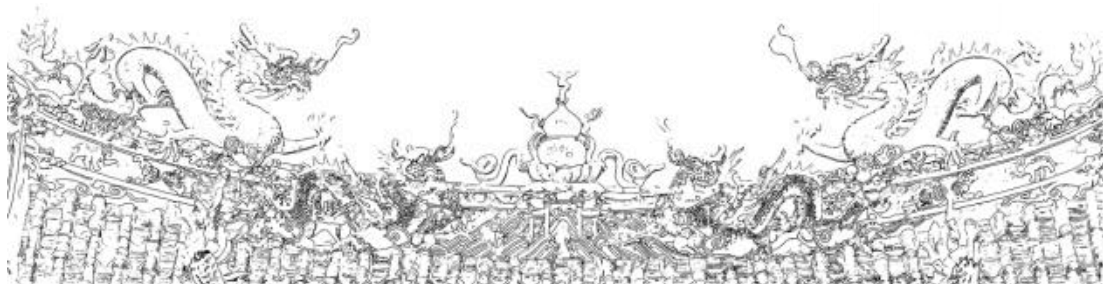


Fig. 7 Roof decoration of three-story building

Image source: self-painted by the author

The roof ridges of the Tonghuai Cultural Center feature orb-shaped and vase-shaped roof-ridge finials, as well as dragon-shaped protective brakes. Besides the bird and flower patterns identical to those on the roof ridges of Guanyue Temple, there are also lake-stone and phoenix-shaped ornaments on the ridge-located decorative parapets. The central ornament of the vase-shaped roof-ridge finial in the Tonghuai Cultural Center is themed around Taishang Laojun. Taishang Laojun, one of the “Three Pure Ones” in Taoism, is known as “Taiqing Moral Heavenly Worthy” (Figure 8). The ridge-top warding-off decoration has a lotus-shaped base, on which there are purple-gold and scarlet gourd-shaped magic tools. Taishang Laojun stands on these tools, riding the clouds and cranes. In the official history of Taoism,

Taishang Laojun doesn't have the purple-gold and scarlet gourd as a magic tool. This is an artistic invention from *Chapter 35 of Journey to the West*. As stated in the book: An ancient Taoist ancestor named Nüwa, who melted stones to mend the sky. While mending at Qian Palace, she saw a celestial vine at the foot of Kunlun Mountain. This purple-gold and scarlet gourd on it has been passed down by Laojun since then. With the wide spread of *Journey to the West*, this has gradually become part of the folk image of Taishang Laojun. This also proves that Quanzhou Guanyue Temple is not only influenced by Taoist culture but is more deeply rooted in local folk culture.



Fig. 8 Decorative modeling of the roof of Tonghuai Cultural Center

Image source: self-painted by the author

7. Conclusion

The renowned writer Feng Jikai once remarked, “Culture may not seem to be directly related to the national economy and people’s livelihood, but it is directly associated with a nation’s character, spirit, consciousness, thoughts, language, and temperament. Without culture, a nation would be like a vegetable.” As an important carrier of national culture, cultural heritage is like the soul and context of a nation, carrying the crystallization of the wisdom of our ancestors and shining as a precious treasure in the long river of history. In the current context where the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage have received extensive attention, it is of great significance to deeply explore the objects of Yasheng in ethnic architecture.

Yasheng objects serve the purposes of exorcism, blessing, and disaster prevention, with anti-victory culture emerging around these objects, rituals, and beliefs. Yasheng frequently manifests as sculpture, painting, and other forms, adorning architectural elements to convey aspirations for tranquility and good fortune. Yasheng culture has a longstanding history. Victory-averse artifacts are prevalent in conventional national architecture, although they face the threat of obsolescence or destruction due to urbanization. Examining the artifacts atop Guanyue Temple in Quanzhou aids in understanding the cultural significance of national architecture and offers theoretical foundations for its preservation and continuation. The roof of Guanyue Temple in Quanzhou is abundant in artifacts. The Jianci dragon atop the temple roof is elegantly shaped and masterfully crafted. The dragon represents power and good fortune, safeguarding the temple. The figures and flowers on the roof of the affiliated building are intricately carved from porcelain, featuring vibrant colors and lifelike representations that depict traditional cultural narratives, symbolizing favorable weather and sustained prosperity, while reflecting the populace’s aspiration for an improved existence. This paper’s research focuses on the insufficient study of the evolution of Guanyue Temple’s Yasheng across several historical periods. In the future, it is essential to expand study concepts, employing multidisciplinary approaches such as history, archaeology, and art, to more thoroughly and profoundly elucidate the evolutionary patterns and cultural significance of Guanyue Temple’s Yasheng throughout many historical epochs. It can also generate novel concepts for the preservation and advancement of traditional architectural culture through the integration of digital technologies.

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