

Research on the Application of Chaozhou Gold Lacquered Wood Carving 'Shrimp and Crab Basket' in Traditional Architectural Design

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Abstract. Chaozhou gold lacquered wood carving, as an outstanding representative of traditional Chinese crafts, holds a unique position in the field of traditional Chinese architectural art due to its exquisite craftsmanship and profound cultural heritage. This paper focuses on the 'Shrimp and Crab Basket' element, showcasing its significant achievements at both technical and cultural levels. Through in-depth literature research and investigation of lacquer craftsmanship, this study explores the historical background and craft characteristics of Chaozhou gold lacquered wood carving, with a particular emphasis on the importance of the 'Shrimp and Crab Basket' in this tradition. The paper also examines the unique features of Chaozhou traditional architectural decorative art, providing a rich context for understanding the application of the 'Shrimp and Crab Basket' in the field of architecture. It specifically analyzes examples of the 'Shrimp and Crab Basket' in various traditional Chaozhou buildings, revealing its functional and symbolic significance in architectural design and discussing how to innovate artistically while respecting tradition. Ultimately, the paper summarizes the important role of the 'Shrimp and Crab Basket' in traditional Chaozhou architectural design and looks forward to its potential applications in future architectural design. This research not only deepens the understanding of Chaozhou gold lacquered wood carving art but also offers a new perspective on the application of traditional crafts in modern architectural design.

Keywords: Chaozhou Gold Lacquered Wood Carving; Shrimp and Crab Basket; Traditional Architectural Design; Cultural Heritage; Modern Application.

1. Introduction

Chaozhou wood carving, a folk carving art filled with regional characteristics, originates from the areas of eastern Guangdong and southern Fujian under the jurisdiction of the old Chaozhou Prefecture. It is mainly found in Guangdong in places like Chaozhou, Jieyang, Shantou, Puning, and others. This art form incorporates rich local folk culture and incorporates various artistic elements such as painting and jade carving, creating a unique and highly aesthetic form of art. Among them, gold lacquer wood carving, as an important and ancient branch of Chaozhou wood carving, is primarily used in architectural decoration, sacred artifacts, furniture, and desktop ornaments. This art form is not only widely loved among the Southeast Asian Chinese communities but has also gained acclaim globally for its unique aesthetic charm. As part of China's intangible cultural heritage, Chaozhou wood carving was included in the national intangible cultural heritage list in 2006.

The gold lacquer technique is at the core of Chaozhou wood carving and is crucial to its aesthetics. Therefore, a deep investigation and preservation of the "shrimp and crab basket" theme in gold lacquer wood carving holds significant importance. This paper examines the craftsmanship behind the "shrimp and crab basket," compiles relevant literature, and combines traditional Chinese lacquer art theory and practice to explore the application of the "shrimp and crab basket" in traditional Chaozhou architecture and its contributions to architectural aesthetics and cultural value. This research will focus on the design characteristics of traditional Chaozhou architecture, analyzing the

decorative role and cultural significance of the "shrimp and crab basket" in these buildings. By analyzing examples from renowned Chaozhou buildings, this paper aims to reveal how the "shrimp and crab basket" carries cultural significance in architecture. Additionally, considering the dialogue between tradition and modernity, this study will also explore how to innovatively incorporate the traditional element of the "shrimp and crab basket" into modern architectural design to achieve cultural preservation and innovation. Through this research, we hope to not only enhance understanding of the role of the Chaozhou gold lacquer wood carving "shrimp and crab basket" in architectural art but also provide new perspectives and considerations for the preservation and promotion of this precious cultural heritage.

2. Overview of Chaozhou Gold Lacquer Wood Carving "Shrimp and Crab Basket"

2.1. Definition and Background

The "shrimp and crab basket" is a unique element in Chaozhou gold lacquer wood carving, renowned for its intricate craftsmanship and elaborate decorative style. The term derives from its distinctive characteristics and is commonly found in traditional Chaozhou buildings such as temples, ancestral halls, and ancient residences. Its main features include delicate lines, rich decorative patterns, and the use of gold lacquer, giving it a visually stunning and profound appearance.

The history of Chaozhou gold lacquer wood carving dates back to ancient times, with roots tracing back to the Tang and Song dynasties and reaching its pinnacle during the Ming and Qing periods. Woodcarvings from this era were often found in the residences of high-ranking officials and temples, known for their gilding techniques. For instance, the Ming Dynasty's "Guangji Bridge Ode" describes it as follows: "Five zhang per floor, ten zhang per pavilion, splendid carved railings, gilded corners, curved balustrades, and vermilion lacquer with white lime." The splendid wood carving art of that time became a prominent feature. During the Qing Dynasty's Qianlong period, gold lacquer wood carving gradually evolved into a luxurious craft, extensively used in various architectural settings. Among them, the "shrimp and crab basket" as a typical subject matter has become a symbol of Chaozhou wood carving art, reflecting the exceptional craftsmanship of artisans and the societal culture and aesthetic trends of that era.

2.2. Craftsmanship Characteristics

Chaozhou gold lacquer wood carving encompasses a wide variety of themes, including historical and contemporary figures, flowers, birds, fish, insects, dragons, tigers, lions, and elephants. Typically, camphor wood is used as the raw material due to its resistance to decay, allowing these artworks to endure for centuries. In terms of composition, Chaozhou gold lacquer wood carving incorporates traditional Chinese painting techniques such as scattered perspective. Human figures often depict characters from different time periods, creating complete narratives. The carving techniques are diverse, reflecting the depth and intricacy of Chaozhou's traditional craftsmanship, including multi-layered relief carving, pull-flower carving, and round carving, among others. Gold lacquer wood carvings often employ exaggerated artistic techniques, emphasizing their decorative nature.

In the following "shrimp and crab basket" artwork, the craftsmen first meticulously carve a slightly inclined shrimp and crab basket on a beam support. Subsequently, centered around this basket, they intricately depict five crabs of different shapes, each lifelike, on the rim, body, and bottom of the basket. These crabs are surrounded by branches, adding vivacity and depth to the artwork. Attention to detail, such as hexagonal perforations, woven textures, and the treatment of the basket's rope, is exceedingly meticulous, making the entire piece resemble a real bamboo-woven shrimp and crab basket (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Chaozhou Gold Lacquer Wood Carving "Shrimp and Crab Basket"

2.3. Cultural Significance

The "shrimp and crab basket" in Chaozhou culture is not just a form of decorative art but also a cultural symbol. It not only showcases the culinary culture and regional characteristics of the Chaoshan area but also reflects the beliefs, values, and aesthetic preferences of the local people. It carries three layers of symbolism: Firstly, as Chaoshan is a coastal region, the concept of a "basket full of shrimp and crab" symbolizes a bountiful harvest. Secondly, since wooden carvings from the Chaoshan region were often sold in Guangzhou or produced for consumption and entertainment in Guangzhou during the late Qing Dynasty and the Republican era, the symbolism of the basket, which has a small opening and a large belly, represents the idea of "goods coming in but not going out," making it particularly favored by traders and merchants. Finally, the times when people can go fishing at sea are usually when the sea is calm, and residents living by the coast hope for calm seas while catching shrimp and crab, symbolizing tranquility. Gold lacquer wood carving not only serves a splendid decorative function in architecture but also carries the mission of preserving traditional craftsmanship, serving as a cultural bridge that connects the past, present, and future.

3. Application of the "Shrimp and Crab Basket" in Traditional Architectural Design

3.1. Characteristics of Chaoshan Traditional Architecture

Chaoshan traditional architecture holds a significant place among Chinese traditional architectural styles due to its unique characteristics and craftsmanship. These buildings typically showcase intricate structural designs, complex decorative elements, and rich cultural connotations. Chaoshan's residential homes and ancestral halls are characterized by wooden carved gateways, pavilions, and spacious courtyards adorned with stone carvings and porcelain wall paintings. The gilded and lacquered decorated gables on the buildings reflect the decorative characteristics of the five elements: metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. Chaoshan architecture features a unique beam and frame structure known as the "three woods carrying five wooden gourds with eighteen flowered brackets inside the five viscera." This design has been in use since the late Ming Dynasty. Other architectural characteristics include symmetrical layouts, emphasis on horizontal expansion in the floor plan, decorative roofs, unique door and window designs, and the use of vibrant contrasting colors, emphasizing spatial flow and openness. The layout of these buildings typically adheres to ancient Chinese Feng Shui principles and architectural theories, aiming to achieve harmony with the natural environment.

The decorative arts in Chaoshan architecture are incredibly diverse, including wood carving, brick carving, stone carving, and painted artworks. Among them, wood carving is one of the most prominent decorative arts, known for its intricate carving and complex patterns. Wood carving is

often used to adorn beams, pillars, doors, windows, eaves, as well as interior furniture and ornaments. These wood carving pieces are not only aesthetically pleasing but also rich in cultural and symbolic meanings, featuring traditional stories, historical events, or auspicious motifs. In traditional Chaoshan architecture, the "shrimp and crab basket" serves as an important decorative element, widely applied in both interior and exterior designs of buildings, such as door lintels, eaves, and window decorations, often seen under the eaves and beams. It not only enhances the architectural beauty but also carries profound cultural symbolism.

3.2. Function and Significance of Gold Lacquer Wood Carving "Shrimp and Crab Basket"

Starting from the late Qing Dynasty, the application of the "shrimp and crab basket" in architectural decoration has been increasingly widespread. It not only serves an aesthetic purpose but also carries functional significance. For instance, when used on doors and windows, it can enhance ventilation and natural lighting while providing structural support. On a cultural level, the "shrimp and crab basket" often incorporates auspicious motifs such as dragons, phoenixes, and lotus flowers, which symbolize prosperity, wealth, and longevity in the local culture. In terms of furniture decoration, Chaozhou wood carving finds extensive use. From large items like room screens, coffee tables, and daybeds to smaller items such as tea cabinets, paper tube holders, lamp core holders, and carved wooden pillows, intricate carving craftsmanship can be observed. These wood carvings are widely present in ordinary households in Chaoshan, earning it the nickname "every home is a wooden carving exhibition room." Through these exquisite wood carving artworks, Chaozhou residents demonstrate their pursuit of beauty and art, creating a unique cultural ambiance and a sense of history.

Since the late Qing Dynasty, wood carving artworks with the theme of crab baskets began to depart from their traditional architectural components. During this period, the "shrimp and crab basket" became an important subject in Chinese wood carving art, marking its debut on the international art stage. This form of wood carving art, centered around the theme of shrimp and crab baskets, had a profound impact on the promotion and dissemination of Chaozhou culture, signifying the significant position of Chaozhou wood carving art in global cultural exchanges. Over time, the function of the "shrimp and crab basket" in Chaozhou wood carving art has also undergone significant transformation, reflecting artists' innovations and reinterpretations of this theme. Initially, these wood carving pieces had practical utility and were mainly used in daily life. However, today's "shrimp and crab basket" has evolved into an independent artistic expression. It possesses not only unique cultural value but also irreplaceable artistic significance. This art form quickly gained recognition in China and globally, becoming an important representative of traditional Chinese culture.

3.3. Fusion of Art and Architecture

Chinese architecture predominantly features wooden structures, where wood carving is employed to create elegant and luxurious decorative effects, not only in small components like doors, windows, and railings but also in larger elements such as pillars and beams. Initially used in royal and temple architecture, the art of gold lacquer wood carving spread to the southern regions, where it integrated with local characteristics and gave rise to new styles. The use of the "shrimp and crab basket" exemplifies the perfect fusion of art and architecture. It serves not only as a part of architectural decoration but also as a form of artistic expression. Through intricate patterns and exquisite carving techniques, it showcases the aesthetic sensibilities of the people of Chaozhou and their pursuit of beauty, reflecting a rich cultural tradition and social life.

The first "crab basket" artwork used for architectural decoration was created by Huang Kaixian, a woodcarver from Jieyang County, in the late Qing Dynasty for the Anji Shengwang Temple in Chaozhou, Guangdong. Huang Kaixian meticulously carved and adorned the building, a large earthen structure, with the artwork "Crab Basket," giving rise to the concept of the "shrimp and crab basket" used in wood carving. This precious piece of artwork, "Half-Side Crab Basket," was embedded in the beams and is a typical example of multi-layered relief carving techniques. It vividly depicts the lively posture of crabs inside a bamboo basket, attracting visitors from various regions who came to admire

it. Since visitors could only view it from one side on the beams, it earned the name "Half-Side Crab Basket" (see Figure 1). This artistic creation was initially made for the Shengwang Temple, pioneering wood carving in Chaozhou. It laid the foundation for the "shrimp and crab basket" culture in the region and became a significant part of the local traditional culture, leaving a lasting mark in history (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. "Half-Side Crab Basket"

4. Application of the "Shrimp and Crab Basket" in a Modern Context

4.1. The "Shrimp and Crab Basket" in Contemporary Architecture

In modern architectural design, the integration of traditional elements has become an increasingly popular trend. The application of the "shrimp and crab basket" as a unique cultural heritage in modern architecture is not only a form of respect for traditional art but also an exploration of the fusion between tradition and modernity. Contemporary architects incorporate elements of the "shrimp and crab basket" into the exterior design, interior decoration, and even functional structures of buildings, creating a new visual and cultural experience. The uniqueness of gold lacquer wood carving, with its combination of golden lacquer and wood, adds artistic and exquisite qualities to architecture and decor while exuding an atmosphere of elegance and luxury. The modern application of the "shrimp and crab basket" represents a dialogue between history and modernity, tradition and innovation, evident not only in visual artistry but also in cultural heritage.

4.2. Innovative Application Approaches

When incorporating the "shrimp and crab basket" into modern design, designers should draw inspiration from traditional gold lacquer wood carving and reinterpret it. The "shrimp and crab basket" typically features intricate, complex patterns, and vibrant colors, and designers can reimagine these traditional elements and integrate them into a modern design language.

Additionally, the use of color is a crucial element. Traditional gold lacquer wood carving often employs vivid colors, and designers can maintain consistency with these traditional hues in modern designs, emphasizing the unique charm of traditional culture while preserving the style.

Furthermore, material selection is also essential. Traditional gold lacquer wood carving typically uses wood as the base material with lacquer applied on top. When combining traditional elements with modern design, designers can experiment with combining wood with other materials (such as metal, glass, or plastic). The diversity of materials can provide designers with more creative space and yield richer textures and visual effects.

Lastly, emphasizing functionality and practicality is key to integrating traditional gold lacquer wood carving with modern design elements. Traditional gold lacquer wood carving is often decorative in nature, but modern design places a greater emphasis on utility and functionality. Designers can explore how to blend the decorative aspects of gold lacquer wood carving with functionality, creating more practical and contemporary works. For instance, embedding LED lights within the "shrimp and crab basket" can turn it into a lighting fixture, and incorporating sensors and controllers can give gold lacquer wood carving "shrimp and crab basket" pieces interactive features, such as voice control or touch switches.

4.3. Future Trends

As a traditional art form, gold lacquer wood carving can bring a unique artistic ambiance and personalized charm to modern home design. When incorporating gold lacquer wood carving into contemporary interior design, it is essential to have a deep understanding of its characteristics and techniques and skillfully merge tradition with modernity to create a distinctive design style and personalized spaces. With technological innovations and changes in societal culture, China, which emphasizes the inheritance of traditional culture, is expected to see the "shrimp and crab basket" not only retaining its cultural value and aesthetic appeal in future architectural design but also rejuvenating with new vitality.

5. Conclusion

This study has comprehensively explored the application of the "shrimp and crab basket" element in Chaozhou gold lacquer wood carving in traditional architectural design. By conducting an in-depth analysis of the historical background, craftsmanship characteristics, cultural significance, and its application in traditional and modern architecture, this study has revealed the unique status of the "shrimp and crab basket" as an important cultural and artistic symbol in Chaozhou architecture. The main findings include the artistic value and exquisite craftsmanship of the "shrimp and crab basket." It is not only a masterpiece in craftsmanship but also an integral part of Chaozhou culture, reflecting the rich history and cultural traditions of the region. In traditional Chaozhou architecture, the "shrimp and crab basket" as a decorative element enhances the architectural aesthetics and adds cultural and symbolic significance to the buildings. In modern architectural design, the elements of the "shrimp and crab basket" are reinterpreted and applied in novel ways, showcasing a perfect fusion of tradition and modernity. The significance of this research lies in emphasizing the importance of preserving and inheriting traditional craftsmanship, contributing to the maintenance of cultural diversity and historical continuity. Additionally, this study provides inspiration for modern architects and designers, demonstrating how to incorporate traditional elements into new designs, creating works that are both modern and culturally rich. Ultimately, this research not only enhances our understanding of the traditional art form of Chaozhou gold lacquer wood carving's "shrimp and crab basket" but also offers a new perspective on the application and development of traditional craftsmanship in modern society. Future research can further explore how to better protect, inherit, and innovate traditional craftsmanship in different cultural and geographical contexts, as well as how these crafts can be more effectively integrated into contemporary society and culture.

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