

Historical Examination and Contemporary Conservation Challenges of the Architectural Decorations of Traditional Folk Houses of the Mulao People in the Hechi Region of China

Yuan Liang¹, Yao Wu²

¹Ph.D Candidate, International College, Krirk University, Bangkok, Thailand

²Professor, International College, Krirk University, Bangkok, Thailand

Email: 18207889196@163.com

Abstract

In the southern regions of China, the Mulao ethnic group is regarded as one of the most ancient ethnic communities. This group possesses a long-standing history and a rich cultural heritage, making it a crucial component in the study of regional ethnic histories. It holds a significant place in the historical evolution of China's ethnic diversity. The traditional residential architecture of the Mulao people, along with its decorative elements, forms a vital part of the cultural heritage of the Mulao community. These structures serve not merely as places of residence but also as venues for cultural transmission and practice, reflecting the profound historical and cultural depth of the Mulao people. As carriers of history, these buildings document the culture, art, and spiritual qualities of the ethnic group, playing an indispensable role in the preservation and development of Mulao culture. This paper conducts an in-depth study of the historical evolution of traditional Mulao residential architectural decoration, aiming to explore its traditional features and modern innovations while, the dissertation examines the various challenges currently faced by conservation efforts. The study extensively compares the traditional features and modern innovations of Mulao residential architectural decoration, showcasing unique styles in form, color, and patterns. Through case analysis, successful preservation practices are identified, providing valuable experiences. This provides invaluable experience and profound insights for future cultural preservation efforts. This research contributes to a better understanding and respect for Mulao cultural heritage, offering substantial support for the continued preservation and evolution of Mulao traditional architectural decoration.

Keywords: Hechi Region, Mulao, Traditional Ethnicity, Architectural Decoration.

China's vast territory and extensive history have fostered a deeply profound and splendidly diverse ethnic culture. Architecture embodies the essence of this cultural heritage. The

architectural styles of China's ethnic minorities display the richness and diversity of Chinese culture. (Li, 2022; Bolan & Tingsh, 2023; Smith, 2015). Throughout the millennia of civilization,

residents across various regions have developed distinctive architectural styles of ethnic minorities, reflecting their specific practical conditions. These styles have evolved by taking into account regional climates, geographical features, as well as individual aesthetic preferences and cultural backgrounds, thereby forming architectures with significant regional characteristics (Li & Zhang, 2017; Arenibafo, 2017). In exploring the field of minority architecture, scholars and practical experts are committed to a detailed analysis of the cultural attributes, structural composition, historical evolution, and development trends of these regional architectures. Their aim is to decode the essence of architectural practices under varying ecological and geographical conditions. This effort not only preserves exemplary traditional residential spaces for contemporary and future scholars but also provides valuable experiences and insights for studies on the regional characteristics of architecture (Dunets et al., 2019; Wang & Chiou, 2019). In the exploration of minority architecture, the academic community and practical experts are dedicated to conducting in-depth analyses of the cultural attributes, structural compositions, historical evolution, and developmental trends of architectural spaces in these regions. Their objective is to elucidate the essence of architecture under various ecological and geographical conditions, preserving exemplary cases of traditional residential spaces for both contemporary and future scholars, and providing valuable insights for regional architectural studies. Ethnic culture reflects the unique cultural characteristics that various ethnic groups have created and continuously developed over the course of history (Hechter, 2017; McGreevy, 2016). China has a vast territory and a long history, and the national cultures of the different ethnic groups are deeply rooted; China's vast expanse and abundant resources, coupled with its extensive history, have provided a solid foundation for its ethnic cultures, each of which possesses a unique style and profound

significance (Ge, 2018). Over the course of history, these cultures have gradually evolved into distinctly characterized cultural systems, many traditional elements have rich connotations and flavors, to meet people's emotions and aesthetics (Moser, 2019). In the multicultural context of the times, the characteristic national symbols still have a unique charm in architectural decoration design (Zang, 2015). Traditional culture not only embodies cultural characteristics but also reflects the ideological features of various historical periods (Yuan & Roadkasamsri, 2023). No matter how the times change, the relationship between traditional culture and people's lives will always be linked, which is a nation's sentiment for its own culture. In the field of architectural decoration design, numerous traditional decorative elements demonstrate people's aspirations for an ideal life.

In the decoration of national culture, elements are mainly embodied in three forms: pattern, text, and color (Usmonova, 2020). Traditional decorative patterns have rich artistic ideas, and through long-term evolution to achieve a combination of beauty and practicality, is a unique visual art that resonates with modern aesthetics (Nilam, 2023). Text is the carrier that can express the author's creative idea outside the graphic, which expresses the author's design concept and conveys the information, and the audience understands the design intention and concept through the text (Yuan, 2023). Color constitutes one of the core elements of decorative art, and ancient China developed a unique color system known as the "Five Cardinal Colors." (Zhong, 2021). Ethnic cultural elements in architectural decoration are mainly of four types: furnishings, paintings and calligraphy, colors, and decorations (Carmona, 2021). Furnishings are mainly made of ceramics, auspicious animals with good meaning, flowers, plants trees, etc. Furniture themed with traditional elements not only significantly enhances the aesthetic appeal of architectural decoration but also conveys the deep meanings and connotations of ethnic traditional culture (Xu & Dewanker, 2020). In

China, calligraphy and painting act as the primary mediums for transmitting cultural heritage, playing a crucial role in this process, in decorative design mainly as the main elements to reflect the design concept, style, and other functions (Peng & Zhang, 2017). Different colors represent different symbolic meanings in different regions and nationalities, and it is necessary to pay attention to understanding the color preferences of different nationalities when designing, to avoid unnecessary designs that are not in line with the local national culture (Huang et al., 2019). The decoration is the technique closest to life and is the treasure left by the ethnic groups in the development. The main ornaments of the Mulao ethnic group mainly include fish patterns, flower patterns, and so on. As shown in Figure 1.



Figure.1 Figure Mulao Ornaments

China's vast territory is home to fifty-six ethnic groups, each possessing its own unique architectural culture and biodiversity (Ye & Wang, 2015). This study focuses on the Hechi region in Guangxi, which is the traditional homeland of eight ethnic groups: the Zhuang, Han, Yao, Miao, Mulao, Maonan, Dong, and Shui. The Mulao population in this area is approximately 152,600, accounting for 98% of the total Mulao population nationwide, and represents 0.34% of the population in Guangxi. The Mulao, as one of the indigenous ethnic groups of Guangxi, are primarily concentrated in the Hechi region, particularly in Luocheng Mulao Autonomous County and its surrounding counties. Luocheng Mulao Autonomous County is the only county in China named after the Mulao ethnicity (Rev, 2016). The

Mulao, as one of the indigenous ethnic groups in Guangxi, are predominantly located in the Hechi area, especially in Luocheng Mulao Autonomous County and its adjacent counties. Luocheng Mulao Autonomous County is the only autonomous county in China named after the Mulao ethnicity. The Mulao have a long history and a rich tradition of revolutionary struggle. In Luocheng, the Mulao have formed a stable ethnic community with its own political, economic, and cultural system, possessing a relatively independent and complete set of ethnic culture and traditions. The name Mulao has been recorded since the Qin and Han dynasties, and during the Ming and Qing dynasties, "Mulao" and "Mulao" became the official appellations for the group. However, with the establishment of the People's Republic of China, these names evolved, and the group was officially recognized as the "Mulao" ethnicity (Yantian & Karin, 2022). Even at the time of the first national census in 1953, the ethnic name of Mulao had not yet been determined, but after the ethnic identification, the State Council officially recognized this ethnic group as Mulao in 1956. Unlike the Miao and Yao ethnic groups, the Mulao seldom migrate, starting from their ancestors who settled in Luocheng along the southern edge of the Jiowan Mountains and have been living in the present Luocheng Mulao Autonomous County in Hechi City, Guangxi, with a small number of them in Guizhou Province, which shows the distribution of the Mulao. The population statistics of the People's Committee of Luocheng County in 1957 showed that the population of Luocheng County at that time was 188,715, of which the population of Mulao ethnic group was 40,444, accounting for 21.4% of the total population of the whole county. Due to the small population of this ethnic group, the ethnic group has long been living together with the Baiyue ethnic group and engaging in economic and cultural exchanges, and the cultures created with the neighboring ethnic groups have richness and diversity, which are worthy of in-depth thinking and

research. Although the designation of the Mulao was not clearly established during the first national census in 1953, subsequent detailed ethnic identification efforts led the State Council to formally recognize the group as the Mulao ethnicity in 1956. Unlike other minority groups such as the Miao and Yao, the Mulao seldom engage in migration activities. Since their ancestors settled along the southern edge of the Jiwan Mountains in Luocheng, they have resided in what is now Luocheng Mulao Autonomous County in Hechi, Guangxi. A smaller portion also resides in Guizhou Province, indicating the distribution of the Mulao population. Due to their relatively small population size and long-term coexistence and economic and cultural exchanges with the Baiyue people, the culture that has developed with surrounding ethnic groups is rich and diverse, warranting further exploration and study.

As an indispensable component of the Mulao traditional architectural system, Mulao traditional residences and their architectural decorations embody a rich cultural essence, making them a crucial entry point for exploring the traditional culture of the Mulao ethnicity. (Jia et al., 2023). Therefore, a thorough analysis of the architectural decorations of Mulao traditional residences not only aids in better uncovering the cultural metaphors behind the material forms of the residences (Chu, 2016), but also extends the depth and breadth of research into Mulao traditional culture. Moreover, it facilitates a deeper understanding of the commonalities between Mulao traditional residences and those of other ethnic groups (Li, 2023), accurately captures the distinct characteristics of Mulao traditional dwellings, and comprehensively analyzes the historical development and evolutionary traits of Mulao culture (Chotpradit et al., 2018). In the current economic, social, and cultural context, it is crucial to effectively pass on Mulao culture to future generations. Better preserving and promoting the positive cultural elements embedded in Mulao traditional residences will aid in the inheritance and

enhancement of Mulao traditional culture. The formation and evolution of Mulao traditional residences not only demonstrate a clever integration between humans and nature but also showcase the Mulao people's wisdom in utilizing space, providing valuable lessons for modern residences in adapting to natural conditions. Therefore, deeply exploring the cultural connotations behind the architecture of Mulao residences is not only of significant guidance for the preservation and development of these dwellings but also offers inspirational insights for brick and wood residential architecture in other regions.

Historical Evolution of the Architectural Decoration of the Traditional Houses of the Mulao People

2.1 Historical Origins of the Mulao People

The Mulao, as one of the many ethnic groups in China, have historical roots deeply embedded in the ancient Baiyue people. The Baiyue were a major ethnic group in ancient southern China, primarily distributed across what is today Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, and northern Vietnam. The ancestors of the Mulao are considered to be a branch of this group, and their patterns of migration and settlement are of significant importance for the study of their culture and social structure (Wu Y. & Boonsrianun P., 2023). Historical documents and archaeological findings suggest that the ancestors of the Mulao people may have originally lived in the Lingnan region in ancient times, before gradually migrating westward to the southern edge of the Jiwan Mountains in Guangxi. This geographical shift not only impacted the Mulao's living environment but also had profound effects on their social organization and cultural traditions. In this new geographical setting, the Mulao gradually developed an agrarian lifestyle, which significantly defined their social structure and cultural characteristics (Fei, 2017). On the fertile lands of the Jiwan Mountains, the Mulao people not only cultivated rice but also developed a

unique residential architectural style. These buildings reflect the Mulao's adaptation to the natural environment as well as their aesthetic sensibilities and social values. Mulao residential structures commonly use wood as the primary building material, with architectural styles that emphasize moisture resistance, ventilation, and the ability to withstand the tropical rainforest climate. The evolution of this architectural style represents not merely a choice of technology and materials but also an embodiment of cultural and ecological wisdom (Fei, 2015). In addition to architectural styles, the Mulao have also developed a unique system of decorative arts. These decorative arts are primarily manifested in architecture, clothing, and everyday items, and are imbued with strong ethnic characteristics and symbolic meanings. For example, traditional Mulao clothing is renowned for its vibrant colors and intricate pattern designs, which often symbolize good fortune and serve as identifiers of tribal identity (Wu, 2019b; Wu, 2021). Although the origins and early history of the Mulao people are scarcely recorded in traditional literature, recent archaeological excavations and research have provided a deeper understanding of their history. In various locations in Guangxi, archaeologists have discovered sites associated with the early lifestyle of the Mulao people. The pottery, stone tools, and other artifacts found at these sites offer valuable information that helps scholars reconstruct the historical context of the Mulao (Wu, 2019a).

As an ethnic minority in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China, the traditional residential architecture of Mulao people not only displays unique aesthetic concepts, but also integrates the religious beliefs, social structure and production methods of the ethnic group, which are intuitively reflected in the architectural style and structure. First of all, the architectural style of Mulao traditional houses is inextricably linked with their clan and aesthetics. Architecture is not only a living space, but also a medium for cultural transmission. In the architecture of the Mulao people, many design

details can be seen reflecting the importance they attach to the family and social structure. For example, the traditional houses of the Mulao ethnic group are usually built with wooden structures and sloping roofs, which are not only adapted to the rainy climate, but also conducive to the gathering and activities of family members. The layout of the houses often revolves around a central courtyard, which in Mulao culture is the central place for family gatherings and ceremonial activities, reflecting the family-centred social structure. Secondly, from the geographical and climatic point of view, the choice of building materials and techniques of Mulao dwellings shows a deep understanding of and adaptation to the natural environment. As the Mulao are mainly located in mountainous areas, the available building materials as well as construction techniques are somewhat limited, which requires the use of locally available materials such as timber, bamboo and stone in the construction of dwellings. This use of indigenous materials not only reduces damage to the environment, but also lowers construction costs, in line with the principle of sustainable development. Moreover, the design of Mulao houses also reflects the respect for the family's mode of production and religious beliefs. Many families rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, and house designs often include adequate storage space and areas suitable for processing produce. In addition, religious beliefs are reflected in certain architectural elements. Finally, considering the current environmental challenges and the pressure of modernisation, the traditional Mulao residential architecture is facing the double challenge of preservation and inheritance. On the one hand, modern building materials and technologies offer the possibility of improving living conditions, but at the same time they may impact on traditional building styles and techniques. How to incorporate modern elements based on the preservation of traditional dwellings and realise a harmonious symbiosis between history and modernity is an

important issue in the current cultural preservation work.

2.2 Historical evolution of traditional residential building decoration

Residential architecture is not only a carrier of history and culture, but also a crystallisation of civilisation, so it needs to pass on its cultural lineage through a specific medium. Architectural symbols, through spatial layout, architectural form and decorative art, explain the development history, functional use and aesthetic value of the buildings, and at the same time reflect the lifestyle, social status, moral concepts, cultural traditions and ecological and environmental protection concepts of the occupants or architects, and even the organisational structure of the clans and villages. In the course of more than 400 years of historical evolution, the traditional houses of the Mulao people in Guangxi have gradually developed an architectural style that is in line with the knowledge of the Mulao region, the psychology of the ethnic culture, the traditional ethics and morals, and the philosophical concept of the unity of heaven and mankind. This style not only includes multifunctional design concepts and decorative elements of artistic appreciation, but also demonstrates the diversity of architectural symbols of the Mulao people and their profound regional and ethnic cultural characteristics.

The spatial layout of Mulao traditional villages not only reflects a way of life, but also profoundly reflects the cultural concepts and social structure of the community. These villages are usually situated in the vast plains, with flat and open terrains and favourable natural conditions for the development of agriculture, which shows that the Mulao people choose their settlements strategically and have a deep understanding of the natural environment.

The villages are surrounded by mountains, rivers and rich vegetation, which provide the necessary material resources for the villages and also form the material basis for the worship of nature in Mulao culture. The village structure of the Mulao is relatively unique. The layout is one

in which the courtyards of families are connected to each other and the lanes are connected to each other, demonstrating the openness, inclusiveness and high degree of unity of the community. This structure promotes interaction among community members and strengthens social cohesion within the village. In addition, this spatial connectivity also reflects the importance that the Mulao people attach to family and community relations.

Mulao homes are not just places to live, but also physical manifestations of traditional culture and family values. Spirit halls and shrines in the houses are a bridge between the present and the ancestors, reflecting the respect and remembrance of ancestors in Chinese culture. The spirit hall, usually located in the centre of the house, is the place for rituals and family ceremonies, signifying the continuity of the family and the cohesion of the community. Shrines, on the other hand, are permanently placed in halls or more private spaces to hold images of gods or ancestral tablets, reflecting the residents' daily worship and prayers to gods and ancestors. As the centre of activities for family members and guests, the hall is an important place for family socialising and cultural transmission. In the Mulao tradition, the hall is not only a place to receive guests, but is also commonly used for family gatherings, discussion of household chores or celebration of festivals. The design of such spaces reflects the openness of the family and its hospitality to visitors, while emphasising the interaction and communication between members of the family. In Mulao residential architecture, the design of the elderly room is particularly important, not only for the physical needs of the elderly, but also as a reflection of the culture of filial piety. Elderly people's rooms are usually well-positioned, close to the centre of the family's activities, such as the living room or the fireplace, so that the elderly can better participate in family life. This design reflects the Mulao people's respect and care for the elderly, which is in line with the core value of respecting the

elderly and caring for the young in traditional Chinese culture. Mulao residential buildings usually arrange livestock pens and utility rooms outside the living area, a design that not only helps to keep the living area clean and hygienic, but also reflects the importance attached to the quality of the living environment. The separation of humans and animals reduces the risk of disease transmission, and also reflects the Mulao people's pursuit of quality of life and health-conscious lifestyle in the architectural design. The living space of the Mulao people is not only a reflection of their way of life, but also a visualisation of their cultural values and philosophical thoughts. The design elements of these living spaces, such as hearths, shrines, halls and rooms for the elderly, deeply reflect the family values and spirit of filial piety in traditional Chinese culture. As shown in Figure 2.

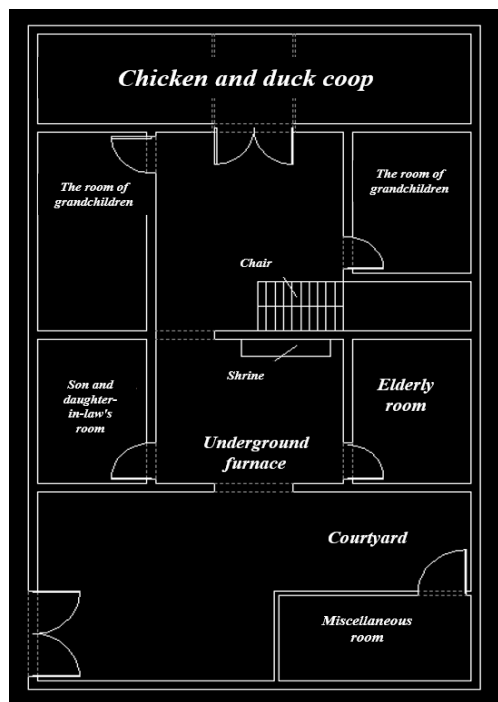


Figure.2 Schematic Layout of Mulao Houses

Traditional Characteristics and Modern Innovation of Mulao Folk House Architectural Decoration

Most of the traditional dwellings of the Mulao people are built on the hills, and their location and layout are deeply influenced by the natural environment. The villages are usually located on the higher slopes of the hills, which is good for flood prevention and enemy invasion, while the open rice fields in front of them are also convenient for agricultural cultivation. This layout strategy is not only in line with the needs of farming culture, but also reflects the Mulao people's deep understanding and utilisation of the natural environment. The building materials of Mulao houses are mainly locally available natural resources, such as green bricks, wood and stones. The use of these materials shows the harmony between the Mulao and the natural environment. In particular, the use of stones extracted from the nearby mountains not only makes the buildings sturdy and durable, but also visually and tactilely consistent with the surrounding natural environment. The structure of hard hill roofs and pierced beams is not only highly durable, but also adapted to the rainy weather conditions, reducing the structural problems that can be caused by waterlogged roofs, as shown in Figure 3. Residential structures in Mulao villages are usually divided into upper and lower floors, a structure that has both practical functions and social significance. The lower part of the wall is made of stone and the upper part is painted white, which not only technically ensures the sturdiness of the building, but also visually creates a sense of simplicity and aesthetics. The use of small rather than large windows in the south-facing part of Mulao houses is an adaptation to the hot and sunny climate of the region. The small windows reduce the heat build-up in the house during the summer heat while keeping the house warm in the winter. This kind of architectural design not only reflects the in-depth understanding of the local climate, but also shows the Mulao people's pursuit of a

comfortable living environment in architectural design.



Figure.3 Mulao Lime Stone and Yellow Clay Chaotic Stone Walls

The geographical choice of the villages of the Mulao people not only reflects the living habits and historical background of the community, but also reveals their close relationship with the natural environment. In front of the village there is a small river flowing, behind the village there is a big mountain surrounded by fields for cultivation nearby. By the mountain, by the water and near the fields" are the three main elements for the Mulao to choose the location of their villages. The traditional houses of the Mulao ethnic group are usually in the form of "clustered dwellings", where each household has its own gateway and courtyard, and each household is closely connected. The typical features of their house structure are "one row, three rooms, two floors and seven doors". This architectural layout not only demonstrates the characteristics of the social structure of the Mulao ethnic group, but also reflects their living habits and cultural traditions.

It has an overhanging roof, a patio in front of the house and a wall behind the house. A residential house has seven doors in Mulao, specifically the front door, the centre door, the back door and the doors of the four rooms located on the ground floor. This design not only reflects the living habits of the Mulao people, but also reveals the importance it attaches to the allocation of specific functions and privacy of the household space. The totem of the Mulao

ethnic group is the phoenix, and the origin of the phoenix has a lot to do with the living environment, the belief in multiple gods, the ethnic character, and the folk culture. In the Mulao region, the traditional houses of the Mulao people are often described as, "Walking along the stone-paved road, witnessing the phoenix spreading its wings and flying high, passing by the incense hall emitting fragrance, the hearth filled with popularity in all seasons, and the houses are warm in winter and cool in summer." In China, Mulao dwellings possess eight distinctive features.

(1) Luanfeng Shingxiang Roof: The sloping roof of Mulao ethnic houses is mainly composed of three parts of architectural components: the first part of the central decorative part of the main ridge is shaped into a rounded outside and square inside money modeling with tiles and lime; the second part of the decorative part at the two ends of the main ridge is an opposite "phoenix-head" architectural component; The third part at the lower end of the vertical ridge is the architectural component known as the "flying phoenix tail", symbolising the golden phoenix soaring to prosperity. At the lower end of the vertical ridge of the house, the third part is the architectural component known as the "flying phoenix tail", which is designed to symbolise the flying of the golden phoenix and herald an era of prosperity. Overall, the architectural components of the entire roof slope imply the harmony of the family, the reproduction of the population and the growth of wealth. as shown in Figure 4.

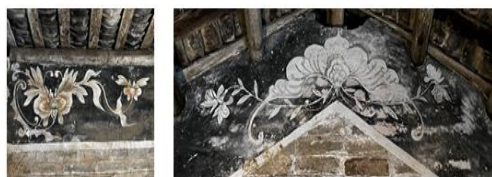


Figure.4 Figure Decorative Patterns on Roofs of Mulao Houses

(2) Green bricks, green tiles, and white walls: The Mulao people are mainly found in the rocky

mountainous areas. This geographical feature has influenced the Mulao people's choice of residence and shaped their way of life to a certain extent, and build their houses with local materials, mainly green stones (limestone), green bricks, green tiles, mud bricks, lime, cedar wood and so on.

(3) Paintings and Calligraphy Decorating the Walls: The Mulao people have a unique way of decorating their homes, in which the outer walls of the houses and the inner walls of the living rooms are painted with various kinds of flowers, grasses, birds, fishes, bugs, dragons, phoenixes, unicorns, suns, moons, clouds, landscapes and so on, or they write some famous quotations and aphorisms.

(4) Doors and Windows with Auspicious Patterns: Wood carvings are most common in the door pins, door panels, flower windows, beams, plaques, and inlaid carvings on door heads, and furniture furnishings of traditional Mulao dwellings, while stone carvings are extremely common in the thresholds, piers, column bases, steps and other places of the houses. Wood carving and stone carving on the carving of a variety of patterns and shapes are used to symbolize, harmonies and another common expressions of auspicious wishes.

(5) Courtyard patio: Mulao traditional houses are built with a patio at the front and a wall at the back. Depending on the width of the foundation, there are one to three chambers (i.e. kitchen, cattle pen, pigsty, processing room, etc.) built next to the patio.

(6) Doorway: There are two kinds of doorways: the village doorway and the doorway of each household. The sloping roof of the doorway, like that of a big house, is made up of three parts of the building, which is said to be a saying that says "a thousand kilograms of gatehouse, four or two houses". One of the characteristics of Mulao folk houses is that they are not located in the south or the north. In Mulao villages, each family's zamen faces a different direction from the main house. This is because the ancestors of the Mulao people believed that

it is auspicious to build a house in a certain direction in a certain year, so the gatehouse is built in that direction.

(7) Sun and Moon Steps: In many traditional houses of the Mulao ethnic group, the first step from the main door of the house to the "eaves dripping water" is engraved with the pattern of "Sun and Moon", which signifies that the first step out of the house every day is the sun and the moon shining together.

(8) Hall of Fragrance and Fireplace: The most distinctive feature of the traditional houses of the Mulao ethnic group is that when you walk into the hall. The dwelling is a three-room, two-storey structure with a spacious central room that is divided into two front and two back rooms. The dwelling is equipped with a front door, a centre door, a back door and doors to four rooms. The front room (living room) is larger and is used for daily living, meeting guests, and dining, while the rear room is smaller in size and functions primarily as a passageway to the back door and adjacent rear side rooms, as well as a staircase to the first floor.

However, with the progress of society and the development of the times, the architecture of Mulao houses is also undergoing modern innovation. The introduction of modern technology and the updating of architectural design concepts have given new vigour and cultural connotations to traditional Mulao dwellings. In terms of the choice of building materials, the Mulao people's living environment is now emphasising more and more on the concept of environmental protection and sustainable development. Apart from the traditional green bricks and tiles, new environmentally friendly materials such as cement boards, bamboo and wood can be used to minimise the impact on the environment. In terms of architectural design, modern Mulao houses pay more attention to practicality and comfort. While preserving the traditional architectural features, they gradually pay more attention to the optimal configuration of indoor

space and its layout planning, so as to make living more comfortable and convenient.

Modern architectural design plays a key role in the construction of Mulao dwellings, which is not only the inheritance of traditional culture, but also the response to the development of the times and the needs of life. Modern architectural design focuses on practicality and functionality, optimising the Mulao dwellings to better suit the needs of modern life. In terms of layout and spatial design, modern dwellings can adopt a more open pattern to improve space utilisation, while focusing on the division of functional areas to make living more convenient and comfortable.

It pays more attention to environmental protection and sustainable development in terms of material selection, energy use, and architectural design, adopting sustainable materials to reduce dependence on natural resources, using energy-saving equipment and technology to reduce energy consumption, and even designing a rainwater collection system and solar panels to realise the sustainable use of resources.

Combining traditional cultural elements with modern aesthetics as well as design concepts to give the building a more significant contemporary character and enhance its artistic value. For example, in terms of façade design, decorative elements and colour schemes, modern design elements have been incorporated to make the buildings more vibrant and personalised, while maintaining traditional features.

To sum up, the application of modern architectural design in Mulao residential houses is not only the inheritance of traditional culture, but also a response to the development of the times and the demand for residence. Focusing on functionality, environmental protection, intelligence, humanisation and cultural integration, the design of modern Mulao folk houses promotes the inheritance of traditional culture and also meets the high demand of modern residents for quality of residence, demonstrating the achievements of architectural design in diversity and innovation.

Analysis of Contemporary Protection Cases

Shiweitun and Daledong villages, as quintessential representations of traditional Mulao communities, possess profound historical contexts and distinctive architectural characteristics. As shown in Figure 5, Situated in the northwestern part of Dongmen Town within the Luocheng Mulao Autonomous County, Shiweitun village harbors over six centuries of history and is predominantly inhabited by the Yin family from the 'Si Dong' clan. The architectural legacy of the village, primarily established during the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China period, showcases the traditional Mulao ethnic features not only in structural design but also in ornamental aesthetics. These buildings are distinguished by their elaborate wooden beam frameworks, exquisite stone carvings, and decorative eave paintings, which reflect the aesthetic values and cultural symbols of the Mulao community. Most ancient residences in the village are constructed with brick and tile, featuring richly painted under-eaves and a few windows that still retain intricately carved wooden patterns. The village exudes a strong Mulao ethnic ambiance, surrounded by pristine mountains and clear waters, offering an ideal agricultural setting. The harmonious integration of cultural and ecological environments epitomizes the village's essence.



Figure.5 Shiwei Ancient Village, Guangxi

Since 2011, Shiweitun has seen significant improvements in its infrastructure, particularly with the construction of cement roads throughout the village, which have greatly facilitated the

daily lives of the residents and the accessibility for tourists. Enhancements in the width and quality of these roads have not only improved the village's transport conditions but also eased the development of other infrastructural facilities. For instance, the establishment of cultural activity buildings and illuminated sports courts has effectively promoted community cultural events and resident interaction. Moreover, Shiweitun has achieved notable success in cultural heritage conservation. Architectural structures such as ancient Mulao archways, cultural galleries, and pavilions not only enhance the village's environment but also provide spaces for showcasing traditional culture. The design and construction of these facilities have been carefully integrated with the traditional Mulao architectural style, preserving traditional woodwork techniques and decorative arts, such as wood and stone carvings, which are vital components of the Mulao architectural culture. With the improvement of infrastructure and the protection of cultural heritage, Shiweitun has gradually become an emerging village that showcases Mulao ethnic culture and fosters the development of the tourism and cultural industry. The growth in tourism has stimulated the local economy and generated new employment opportunities.



Figure.6 Yong'an Bridge Merit Monument

The Luocheng County government has undertaken protective restoration of the ancient village of Shiweitun and its traditional residences to preserve their historical integrity and cultural authenticity. Notably, the government has also safeguarded significant elements such as the 70-meter-long defensive stone wall at the edge of the village and the 2.4-meter-high Yong'an

Bridge Merit Stele by the creek, as shown in Figure 6. In 2009, the Yong'an Bridge Merit Stele was designated as a county-level key cultural heritage site. A 'Pavilion of Ethnic Unity Ancient Stele' was constructed at its original location to enhance its protection. This not only aids in the preservation of the artifact but also serves as a symbol promoting ethnic unity. Complementing government conservation efforts, the villagers of Shiweitun autonomously established the Guangxi Shiwei Ancient Village Tourism Development Company. This entity not only undertakes the maintenance and restoration of some ancient residences but has also developed tourism projects centered around Mulao culture. These include tours of ancient dwellings, visits to folklore museums, and performances of Mulao ethnic products and dances. This model not only fosters cultural heritage but also creates new economic opportunities for the local community.

The implementation of conservation projects has significantly improved the natural ecological environment of the village. By minimizing intrusive constructions and strengthening environmental management, the traditional village's natural landscape has been restored and preserved. This not only benefits biodiversity conservation but also provides the villagers with a healthier and more pleasant living environment. Strategies such as in-situ conservation and living heritage preservation ensure that traditional buildings and cultural practices are not only saved but also continue to be utilized and transmitted in everyday life. This approach emphasizes not just the preservation of physical structures but also the ongoing dissemination of cultural content, such as through the revival of traditional festivals, folk activities, and handicrafts. The development of culture-themed tourism projects has turned the Mulao villages' cultural tourism into a significant force driving economic development. This enhancement of the villagers' economic income has also increased external recognition and respect for Mulao culture. The growth of cultural

tourism helps foster a sense of cultural pride and broader social identity, thereby providing motivation for the long-term preservation of cultural heritage.

Conclusion

This study conducts an in-depth and comprehensive exploration of traditional Mulao residential architecture and its decorations. It examines the historical evolution, traditional features, modern innovations, and the contemporary conservation challenges faced by these decorations. Through our research on traditional Mulao architectural decorations, we have gained a profound understanding of their significance in cultural transmission and development, as well as the complexities involved in their preservation in modern society.

In contemporary society, driven by urbanization and modernization, traditional Mulao architectural decorations are confronting severe challenges. As an integral part of Mulao culture, traditional Mulao dwellings require effective protection to ensure the continuity and transmission of this cultural heritage. To achieve this, a series of comprehensive measures must be adopted. These include governmental policy support, community participation, the promotion of academic research, and innovative

architectural design. These collaborative efforts are essential to safeguard and sustain the cultural legacy of the Mulao people.

In the process of conserving traditional Mulao residential architecture, several positive conservation cases have emerged, providing valuable references and insights for future cultural preservation endeavors. During these conservation efforts, it is crucial to fully respect and preserve the traditional culture of the Mulao people, including their unique architectural decorative elements. Simultaneously, integrating these elements with innovative approaches allows for the adaptation to modern society, facilitating both the transmission and development of culture.

In summary, researching the decorative aspects of traditional Mulao residential architecture not only fosters a deeper understanding and respect for this ethnic cultural heritage but also offers valuable experiences and insights for cultural conservation in similar contexts. This exploration contributes to the development of a framework for conservation measures, adaptable to various cultural contexts. Moving forward, we aim to delve deeper into the significance of Mulao traditional architectural decorations to provide stronger support for their protection and transmission.

WORKS CITED

- Li, Y. (2022). Inheritance and development of traditional culture: a new path for design education reform in China.
- Bolan, Y., & Tingshu, W. (2023). Chinese Culture and Building a Community of Chinese Nationalities: An Analysis. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 785-797.
- Smith, R. J. (2015). *The Qing dynasty and traditional Chinese culture*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Li, G., & Zhang, B. (2017). Identification of landscape character types for trans-regional integration in the Wuling Mountain multi-ethnic area of southwest China. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 162, 25-35.
- Arenibafo, M. F. E. (2017). The Transformation of Aesthetics in Architecture from Traditional to Modern Architecture. *Journal of Contemporary Urban Affairs*, 1(1), 35-44.
- Dunets, A. N., Zhogova, I. G., & Sycheva, I. N. (2019). Common characteristics in the organization of tourist space within mountainous regions: Altai-Sayan region (Russia). *Geo Journal of Tourism and Geosites*, 24(1), 161-174.
- Wang, H. F., & Chiou, S. C. (2019). Study on the sustainable development of human settlement space environment in traditional villages. *Sustainability*, 11(15), 4186.
- Hechter, M. (2017). *Internal colonialism: the Celtic fringe in British national development*. Routledge.

- McGreevy, J. T. (2016). *Parish boundaries: The Catholic encounter with race in the twentieth-century urban north*. University of Chicago Press.
- Ge, Z. (2018). *What Is China?: Territory, ethnicity, culture, and history*. Harvard University Press.
- Moser, L. J. (2019). *The Chinese mosaic: The peoples and provinces of China*. Routledge.
- Zang, X. (2015). *Ethnicity in China: A critical introduction*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Yuan, H., & Roadkasamsri, V. (2023). Miao Costume in Guizhou: Re-Invention of Tradition Process to Commoditization (Doctoral dissertation, Mahasarakham University).
- Usmonova, L. (2020). IMAGE PHILOSOPHY OF CENTRAL ASIAN MINIATURE ART. *Theoretical & Applied Science*, (3), 222-226.
- Nilam, W. (2023). Fusion of Ornamental Art and Architectural Design: Exploring the Interplay and Creation of Unique Spatial Experiences. *Studies in Art and Architecture*, 2(3), 10-27.
- Yuan, X. (2023). Research on the Application of Traditional Patterns in Modern Packaging Design in Western China: Take the Mandala Pattern as an Example. *Frontiers in Art Research*, 5(17).
- Zhong, M. (2021). Study of digital painting media art based on wireless network. *Wireless Communications and Mobile Computing*, 2021, 1-11.
- Carmona, M. (2021). *Public places urban spaces: The dimensions of urban design*. Routledge.
- Xu, C., Huang, Y., & Dewancker, B. (2020). Art inheritance: an education course on traditional pattern morphological generation in architecture design based on digital sculpturism. *Sustainability*, 12(9), 3752.
- Peng, Q. I., & Zhang, W., (2017). Expression of National Cultural Elements in Ancient Costume Animation Movie Scene. *Journal of Landscape Research*, 9(3).
- Huang, B. X., Chiou, S. C., & Li, W. Y. (2019). Study on courtyard residence and cultural sustainability: Reading Chinese traditional Siheyuan through Space Syntax. *Sustainability*, 11(6), 1582.
- Ye, X. Y., & Wang, B. (2015). A Study of the Cultural Policy of the Communist Party of China towards Ethnic Minorities in the New Century. *문화정책*, 2(2), 19-32.
- REV, S. (2016). *Environmental and Social Management Framework*.
- Yantian, H., & Karin, K. (2022). *The Transmission Process of Shanxi Badatao in China* (Doctoral dissertation, Mahasarakham University).
- Jia, S., Isa, M. H. B. M., & Aziz, Z. B. A. (2023). Spatial characteristics of defensive traditional architecture in multiethnic village of Guangxi: Case studies of Mozhuang Village and Guxietun Village. *Frontiers of Architectural Research*.
- Chu, Y. (2016). *Standardizing minzu: A content analysis of the depiction of shaoshu minzu in three Chinese elementary curriculum standards and textbooks* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Li, X. (2023). *Architecture, Ritual and Cosmology in China: The Buildings of the Order of the Dong*. Taylor & Francis.
- Chotpradit, T., Jacobo, J. P., Legaspi-Ramirez, E., Nelson, R., Huy, N. N., Polmuk, C., ... & Supangkat, J. (2018). Terminologies of "Modern" and "Contemporary" Art in Southeast Asia's Vernacular Languages: Indonesian, Javanese, Khmer, Lao, Malay, Myanmar/Burmese, Tagalog/Filipino, Thai and Vietnamese. *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, 2(2), 65-195.
- Wu, Y., & Boonsrianun, P. (2023). Literacy Transmission of Mulao Folk Songs during the Zoupo Festival in Luocheng, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 11(3), 208-216.
- Fei, X. (2017). The formation and development of the Chinese nation with multi-ethnic groups. *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology*, 1, 1-31.
- Fei, X. (2015). Diversity within integration. *Globalization and cultural self-awareness*, 77-108.
- Wu, C. (2021). The Indigenous Paleolithic Cultural Inheritance in the "Maritime Region of Southeastern Asia" During the Early Neolithization Around 10,000 Years Ago. *The Prehistoric Maritime Frontier of Southeast China: Indigenous Bai Yue and Their Oceanic Dispersal*, 61-85.
- Wu, G. (2019a). Investigating Southern Minority Nationalities. *Narrating Southern Chinese Minority Nationalities: Politics, Disciplines, and Public History*, 103-137.
- Wu, G. (2019b). Telling Southern Minority Nationalities to the Public. *Narrating Southern Chinese Minority Nationalities: Politics, Disciplines, and Public History*, 161-186.