



USR Project: “Cultural Sustainability and Urban Revitalization: The Conception of Shilinology” of SCU



What is Paste Decoration? Art from Above

by Wei-Hao Chen, Organized by Shiow-Duan Hawang
Advised by Sifu Wei-Hao Chen, Illustrated by Tzu-Ning Wang



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USR Project Introduction

Soochow University (SCU)

Cultural Sustainability and Urban Revitalization: The Conception of Shilinology

In the spirit of "university social responsibility (USR)", SCU's project "Cultural Sustainability and Urban Revitalization: the Conception of Shilinology" is dedicated to apply academic knowledge and talented academics into the effort of revitalization and give back to the community. For that reason, we've begun collecting local history, ecological information, local specialties for Shilin, planning of day reading trips and hosting training seminars for guides. We hope that through our effort the culture of Shilin and its fruit can be passed on to those who are interested and the young academics of SCU.



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Prologue

During a visit to the Temple of Shennong (God of Agriculture), a major renovation was in progress. Due to its status of a city monument, all renovations are required to be done the traditional way. I was lucky enough to witness the artisan (Sifu) perform the paste decoration for the roof. I watched as the artisan placed the fragmented ceramic on the dragon's body piece by piece.

The artisan (Sifu) worries that once he retires, the art of paste decoration may be lost in the sands of time, because of the danger of working on the roof and the unbearable weather even during rain is no time to rest so the artisans would be busy preparing the ceramic under the roof. Although the salary for a paste decoration Sifu is quite well, young people aren't interested in the profession and the hardship that comes with it. This sad reality made us determined to preserve and promote paste decoration.



Suggested by director Tsai of Lin Yutang house, we invited the son of Sifu Cuan-De Chen's son-Sifu Wei-Hao Chen for a speech on paste decoration in SCU. Sifu Wei-Hao Chen is dedicated to the promotion of the art, and our idea chimes in together. I invited him for a speech and live performance at the USR Expo of the education ministry in November 2022, which was well received. We planned, "The World of Paste Decoration-Traditional Art Appreciation" with

Sifu Chen, an event at the Second Academic Building of SCU from December 5th to 16th, and opened a workshop for those interested in paste decoration on December 13th for students to see and experience the world of paste decoration. If possible, we wish to push these activities into other areas of Shilin District.

Other than speeches, workshops and exhibitions, we also invited Shin-Hong Chen (photographer) to film short videos on the process of paste decoration, it's a work in progress at the moment, and will be promoted on the internet once finished. Words and pictures are crucial for these kinds of promotions, and that's why we're publishing this pamphlet as well.

We hope that if you come across a temple next time, bask in the intricacies and beauty of paste decoration on the roof, for they are all painstakingly made by Sifus.

Shiow-Duan Hawang at Waishuangshi, February of 2023



Work table at construction site.



Wei-Hao Chen practical teaching on paste decoration techniques in SCU.



People participating paste decoration teaching at the 2022 University EXPO.

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1. The Origin of the Pamphlet

During our deep dive into the area's past and cultural memories, we found that many of them are on a one-way trip to obscurity, our visits to the renovating Three Temples of Shilin (Shennong Temple, Hui Ji Temple, Shilin Mazu Temple) gave us the opportunity to closely observe and appreciate the paste decoration work of them. Paste decoration is an inseparable part of temple culture, from the dragons and phoenix on the roof, cochin potteries on the ridge to the dragon-tiger blocks of the temple gate, they are all intricately carved and pasted by artisans. However, people usually disregard these sophisticated artworks and focus on their prayers and the deities they call upon. Due to technological advancement, many paste decorations became mass produced products, challenging the old ways paste decorations are produced. In order to fulfill the project's vision of preservation for all things historical (paste decoration included), we created the pamphlet "*What is Paste Decoration? Art From Above*" to sort and record the art of paste decoration and compare the artworks of the three temples with the end goal of combining traditional art and local history to keep the cultural heritage alive.



The front hall ridge of Shennong Temple.



The front hall ridge of Hui Ji Temple.



The front hall ridge of Shilin Mazu Temple.

2. Paste Decoration



What is Paste Decoration?

"Paste Decoration" is a general term to describe the unique ways in which southern Chinese temples and ancient buildings are decorated.¹ After it came to Taiwan a hundred years ago, it went through extensive development through competition and fusion and came into its own. Paste decoration can be separated into three specific techniques: "Paste Decoration (Jian Nian)", "Clay Shaping (Nisu)", "Cochin Ware (Jiaozhi Tao)", each of these techniques hold its own significance and flair on a temple.



Themes of Paste Decoration

Most of the paste decoration artwork build its theme around mythology, folklore, four virtues (namely loyalty, filial piety, chastity and righteousness) and famous historical events.² The style of paste decoration also differs due to technique, material and period, the size of the "wall (Du)" is also a factor, even if based on the same tale, being put in a different position could alter its style and flair greatly. For example, see "The Nine-curved Yellow River Battle Array" on top of Shilin Mazu Temple's main hall arch and on the beam of Hui Ji Temple front hall's dragon gate.

¹ Taiwan's traditional architectural decorative arts: The composition principle on Chien-nien of human figures. *Journal of design science*, 15(1): 110.

² Chen, Kuan-hsun, Taiwan's traditional architectural decorative arts: The composition principle on Chien-nien of human figures. *Journal of design science*, 15(1): 115-117.



Shilin Mazu Temple "The Nine-curved Yellow River Battle Array."



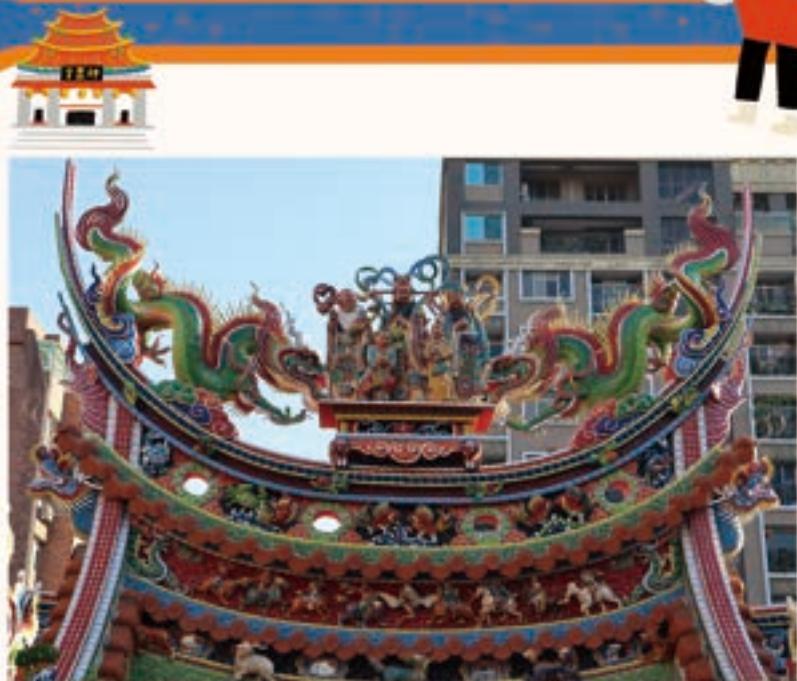
Hui Ji Temple "The Nine-curved Yellow River Battle Array."

"Sangxiao set the Nine-curved Yellow River Battle Array" originates from "The Investiture of the Gods", in this story the Sangxiao fairy maidens trapped Jiang Ziya, Jinzha and Yang Zi in the Nine-curved Yellow River battle array. The artwork from Shilin Mazu Temple is created by cochin technique and the gesture, emotions and instruments they hold all reflect closely to their real-life counterparts, it made the perilous journey of our heroes, the Sangxiao's desire for revenge, and the danger of the array more present to the viewer. In comparison, the drawings of Hui Ji Temple are paintings that present an entirely different feeling to the viewer.



Paste Decoration Trivia: The Sanxing(Fu, Lu, and Shou), Orb and the Two Dragons, Twin Dragons and Tower

“Sanxing”, “Orb and the Two Dragons”, “Twin Dragons and Tower” are all recurring theme on the temple roof, they all hold meanings of peace and joyful life for the believers, the Sanxing is especially common for the front hall of the temple, while Twin Dragons and the Tower usually appear on temples that are Buddhism related since “Tower” is a sacred place where buddha’s remains and mantras are stored and where worshippers gathered.³ However, these are not formal rules and are subject to what the artisans would like to present.



The Sanxing cochin pottery (jiaozi tao) of Shennong Temple's front hall.



Shilin Mazu Temple's Orbs and the Two Dragons paste decoration.



The renovating rear hall of Hui Ji Temple. As Guanyin Buddha and Shakyamuni Buddha are the two main deities, the decoration is naturally Twin Dragons and the Tower.

Introduction to Paste Decoration (JianNian)

The term "Jian-Nian" can be separated by "Jian" (Cutting) and "Nian" (Pasting), it signifies the process of using the cutting plier to cut out the desired shape from ceramics and paste it on the cement body.⁴ Although it can be described in one sentence, the techniques used to achieve them are not an easy work. Take the dragons on the roof as an example, Sifu (craftsman) has to first build the structure by bending steel bars to his will and let it twirl and move the way he wishes, acting as the bone of the dragon, the life in the dragon's movement depends on this step. Secondly, Sifu layers cement on the steel bar to further shape the dragon, this step brings out lifelike qualities of the dragon's muscle, all of these techniques test the skill of a Sifu.



After the structure has been set by the steel bars, cement is layered to create a rough draft of the body.

After multiple layers are applied, the last undried layer of cement is applied with cut ceramic, and its style could greatly vary due to the materials used and way it is applied, this will be further elaborated on the materials and Q&A chapter. Although “Jian-Nian” is two simple actions combined, they must be polished by years of experience so that every hand cut ceramic piece and every cement part combine to become realized artworks.



Using cutting plier to cut glass into desired shape.



Pasting the finished glass on to cement, similar to mosaics.



Introduction to Clay Shaping (Nisu)

Clay Shaping, traditionally known as "Dui Hui", is a technique that uses materials such as stucco or cement to create artwork.⁵ Similar to paste decoration, layers of stucco or cement are held in place by bronze or steel bar within, once layering is complete the outer layer is carved and sharpened by Sifu with "Cement Spoon (Hui Shi Zi)". Clay shaping is a very common practice for temple decoration, but is usually ignored since most artworks of this technique would be misidentified as stone works. From the dragon spires of temple halls, dragon and tiger block of temple gate to the dragon behind the shrine are all places where clay shaping would be utilized. Sifus get their mettle tested when they create dragons and phoenix through clay shaping, whether they could balance the sharp details and soft muscles and make them as lifelike as possible is where a skillful Sifu makes his name.



圖片提供：陳威豪司卓

Song-Di Chen Sifu creates the shrine dragon through clay shaping, the Sifu holds a cement shovel on his left hand and cement spoon on the right to carve out dragon's detail such as scales, fins and textures.



The clay shapen dragon and tiger block of Hui Ji Temple's Wenchang Tower. Dragon and tiger block are two blocks in front of the temple's gate, the dragon is placed on the left and the tiger on the right. They both serve an aesthetic purpose and act as a sign of direction.





Introduction to Cochinchina Technique (Jiao Zhi Tao)

Cochinchina Technique is the most difficult school of technique of the three, using clay as the main material. Sifus knead the artworks by hand before firing them. Traditionally, all cochin works' materials are sourced locally and fired by makeshift kiln on site, lacking the high temperature of a formal kiln, they tend to break in production.⁶ Even when finished they are susceptible to the weather and humidity. Another way to produce them is to first apply a layer of white glaze and fire it by high temperature, and then using "overglaze" and fire it once more by lower temperature to make the colors more vibrant and layered, they are often seen on top of temples or placed on the part connecting the roof and wall (Shuiche Du). As the technique develops, more colors are incorporated into cochin, failure rate for firing lessened and cochin wares themselves become even more sophisticated.



Shuiche Du of Shennong Temple's front hall "The Quelling of Seven Demons on Mei Mountain" mainly describes the battle between Yang Jian, Nezha and the seven demons. The character on the left is the white ape, one of the seven demons, with a distinct facial feature of having a sharpened and protruding nose and jaw in comparison to human's smooth feature to fit its ape caricature, which must be taken into account as early as the shaping phase. Its mount, the "yellow tiger", was given a more vibrant color to emphasize on its fur.

⁶ Li, Chun-yu. A study on the development of Koji ceramic art in Taiwan and its development to the local cultural business. *Journal of Tainan University of Technology*, 27:98.



Cochin Pottery Trivia:

Overglaze Decoration- Overglaze is a technique which applies a white glaze on the ware for the first high temperature firing, only then would it be painted by other colors and go through firing once again at a lower temperature.⁷ Due to the two or more layers of paint job applied, places where paint is applied would be slightly more prominent and its color more vibrant, however, due to it being painted over the ware, its color fades faster.



Side wall panel of Shennong Temple's front hall "The Seven Fairies". Due to the simplistic nature of earlier cochin ware facial features, they are usually only emphasized by blush and lipstick, while clothing is the main way to distinguish fairies from other characters. Every fairy has different clothing tailored made for them in the shaping phase, they are also colored and decorated differently during the firing phase.

⁷ Chang, Ching-hsin. A limited perspective on overglazed ceramic sculpture in the Qing dynasty: Based on resembling porcelains and Yixing stonewares. *The Sculpture Research Semimonthly*, 10:67.

3. Materials



Bowl Shard



Colored bowls made for paste decoration, they're slightly thinner than normal bowls, which makes it easier to cut.

Bowl shard paste decoration came from the Minnan region of China. According to Guo Tianlai school of paste decoration (Where our partner Sifu Chen Wei Hao learnt his craft), bowl shard paste decoration came to Taiwan around a hundred years ago, using shards of ordinary ceramic bowls to decorate the temple roof. Nowadays due to the demand of heritage restoration, antique ceramic bowls are no longer easy to acquire, in order to meet the demand ceramic factories, make bowls that are specifically for paste decoration.* Similar to glass, bowl shards can be pasted on to different parts of the base layer to be more three dimensional and unique.



Parts like the dragon's cheeks and antlers can all become more lively and three dimensional using the curvature of bowls shards, the way they reflect sunlight also give the artworks a different flair in comparison to the ones using flat material.

* Chen, Mei-ling (2014). The impact of changes in materials and methods on the preservation and continuation of traditional art of cut-and-paste ceramic ornamentation. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Conservation*, 28:69.

Glass



Glass used for paste decoration, every single one has the curvature of the original glass orb it was cut from.

Glass paste decoration, approximately appeared during 1950s~1980s, following Taiwan's industrial development, colored glass lamp shade became a major export of Taiwan⁹, Sifus experimented with the material and realized due to its translucent property, it could reflect the sunlight in ways never before seen and added a unique flair to the artwork, it became a sensational trend for quite some time. Due to the high demand at the time, glass factories produce glass orbs in bulk, which sifus would shatter into shards themselves. However, this material holds a

downside, in comparison to ceramic, glass is not adaptive to being exposed in rain and other natural elements nor can it handle heat expansion and contraction, due to all of these factors, glass could only last ten to fifteen years.



The glass decorated Lu Dongbin on the eight immortals wall of Shilin Mazu Temple stage area.



⁹ Chen, Jin-chang (2015). The story of Hsinchu glass. *Taiwan People News*, December 17.

Enamel (Mosaic)



Within the bowls are the enamel materials meant for mosaic works, all are shaped and sized differently.

Enamel paste decoration is the product of high demand for building temples and highly developed manufacturing capability. By firing pre-existing mold filled with ceramic grout are works of this material created. Enamel paste decorations come in different shapes and sizes, from an entire animal to parts of one such as dragon claws or head, to mosaic material of different shapes are all producible. This method greatly reduced time of production by skipping the process where Sifus shatter bowls or glass orb to create shapes. The firing process uses high temperatures, therefore colors on enamel do not fade for at least 30–50 years. With molds readily available, not only can artworks be mass produced and monolithic, it also greatly reduces the time and cost¹⁰, but it also takes varieties and flairs of paste decoration away.



¹⁰ Chen, Mei-ling (2014). The impact of changes in materials and methods on the preservation and continuation of traditional art of cut-and-paste ceramic ornamentation. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Conservation*, 28:69.



Artworks on the temple ridge and front hall roof of the Temple of lonely ghost and holy mother in Shilin are all enamel paste decorations. From vegetation, animals to plants are all monolithic, which all hold properties such as easy to construct, long lasting color and high durability.

4. Tools of the Trade



Diamond Pen(Zuan Bi)

As the name suggests, diamond pen has diamond pieces installed at the tip of the pen. During the process of paste decoration, diamond pen is used for cutting bowls or glass orbs into fitting sizes, afterwards cutting pliers are used to carve shards into the exact shape. While cutting the pieces, diamond pens leave cut marks on the ceramic or glass, and sifus must separate them by hand by pressuring the sides of the cut marks. The skill for wielding a diamond pen is something an apprentice must learn through experience and meticulousity.

Cutting Plier (Jian Qian)

During the process of paste decoration, a massive amount of bowl or glass shards in different shapes and sizes are required, sometimes acting as scales of a dragon, hairs or animals or even armor and weapon of character. After raw materials are cut by diamond pen, a cutting plier would be used to create the desired shape, although called a cutting plier, most shards are grinded into the desired shape by the plier.



From left to right: diamond pens, cutting pliers.

Cement Spoon (Hui Shi Zi)

It has two main uses, one is to stir the cement, the other one is to create shape and texture on the artwork¹¹. Cement spoon almost acts like a brush in Sifu's hand, creating lively artworks on walls and bases with every stroke, only time and experience can grant skill to cement spoon's user.

Cement Shovel (Tu Peng)

When creating the base of the artwork or clay shaping, it is used to hold cement, one can stir the cement on the shovel to increase the flexibility and firmness of it.



Cement shovel and cement spoon.

¹¹ Pai, Shih-yi (2015). Artistic working technique of traditional Taiwanese ceramic applique. Journal of Cultural Heritage Conservation, 31:49.

Steel Bar

Steel bar act as the frame for the base of the artwork, Sifus would adjust the steel bars angles according to the gesture and action, then layer cement onto the steel bars.



Steel bar used for paste decoration.

Cement

Traditionally lime is used to act as the base for paste decoration, however due to cost and convenience it was replaced by cement. By mixing cement and water, the mixture can be applied to the steel bar frame to create the shape of the artwork layer by layer, and the final layer has shards placed on them to finish the job.



Cement must be stirred constantly by the cement spoon while on the cement shovel.

5. Paste Artistry of The Shilin Three Temples

Shennong Temple



Recently, Shennong Temple has gone through a massive renovation, not only are many cochin wares and paste decoration artworks restored, many of the earlier cochin wares were preserved and kept within the temple and has become a signature of Shennong Temple.

A. “The Lion”

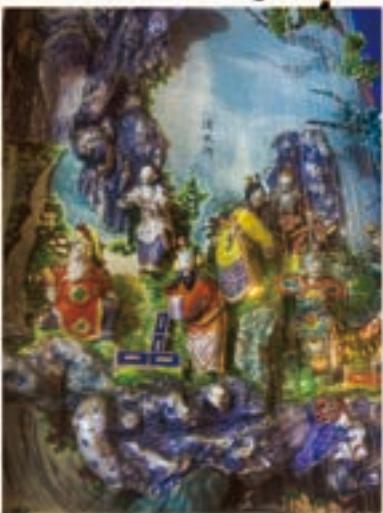
The lion on Shennong Temple’s rooftop is an artwork of bowl shard paste decoration. Unlike the dragon which is covered in scales that are shaped to be rounded or like water droplets with little fur on it, lion naturally is covered in fur, therefore sifu must prepare similar yet differently shaped bowl shards that all curved differently with different colors to create effects of suppleness and contour. The facial features of the lion are also a major focus where the eyes and lip of the lion have gaps in between and has been painted with color to bring out the eyes from the brows and create a deeper look to the eyes. Sifu also used steel bars to create the supple and curvy silver whisker.



B. “Wei River”¹²



The picture on the right was taken from the Shuiche Du area of Shennong temple main hall, it's made from cochin technique, which makes it more colorful and contrasting. Other than the characters, rocks are also made of cochin while the tree leaves were made from glass and the sky and waterfall are hand painted. The rock utilizes clay to pair with glaze paint, and the rock's texture of being washed over by nature's element has also been taken into account to make it more three dimensional, which gives further sophistication to the scene.



The picture on the left was taken on the front hall rooftop of Shennong Temple, newly made in the two-year restoration period by cochin technique. The scene speaks of a quest for a wise advisor on the Wei River, because of the angle and time it's made, project an entirely new flair.

“Wei River” is a story of King Wen of Zhou in search of Jiang Zi Ya in the hope of making him his top minister. Jiang Zi Ya gave advice that offended King Zhou of Shang, which caused him to self-exile to Wei River, and fish during his days there, yet his intention was “Not for fish and koi, but for kings and dukes”. Finally at the age of 80, King Wen of Zhou located him and made him the top minister and successfully put King Zhou and his tyranny to an end. This is a common folklore in our fortune poem, that teaches the quality of patience and preparing for the right moment. This story pairs with Hui Ji Temple’s “King Wen and His Carriage”.

C. "Ma Chao on Tong Pass"¹³ (Partial)

Pictures below are the partial picture of the cochin wares between the beams of the front hall, on the right is a newly made cochin ware of temple rooftop, both talks about "Ma Chao on Tong Pass", where Cao cao was planning on conquering Tong Pass yet was stopped by Ma Chao. You can clearly see Ma Chao and Cao Cao in the picture on the left, where the two characters have much more sophisticated clothing and armor. Things such as the ride of choice, traditional makeup for a villain, red coat and beard are all notable features of Cao Cao. Using these features, Sifu created the scene and made distinct features for the characters. As for the cochin wares on the rooftop, because of the space available created a more chaotic and lively battle scene.

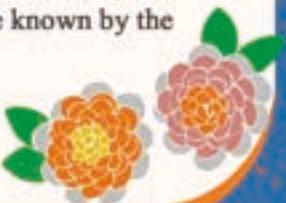


¹³ From Romance of Three Kingdoms.

D. “Dragon King’s Meeting with Mazu”



This artwork is placed on the left side Shuiche Du of the main hall rooftop, made by cochin technique. The scene speaks of the time when the dragon king of the four seas and his shrimp and crab warriors went to visit Mazu. Other than Mazu, General Hawkeye, General Sharpear and her servant, most are marine soldiers whose marine characteristics are shown on different parts of their body. Take the first picture as an example, two soldiers’ heads are crab and shark but their bodies remain human. The second picture shows characters such as squid and clam, the former is known by his head while the latter can be known by the shell it carries on the back.



Hui Ji Temple



Hui Ji Temple also underwent renovation in these couple of years, originally the rooftop contain mostly glass paste decoration, however these artworks are mostly damaged due to time, in consideration of preservation of tradition and longevity, temple management decide to use bowl shard decoration as the main restoration method, most artworks on the roof are now mostly bowl shard decoration works.

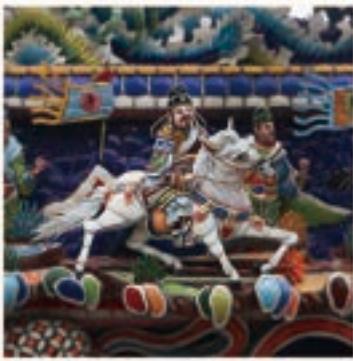


From Sanxiang at the center of the rooftop, to the deer fur on the eight immortals' wall are all decorated by bowl shards, not only are the clothing and instrument of Sanxiang are bowl shard decorated, even the beard is presented by the same material, in order to capture the layering of beard and brows, shards had to be placed on top of each other. As for deer fur, bowl shards must be cut thin and placed as tightly together as possible, in order to make sure the deer is as realistic as possible.

A. "The Conquest of Chen Yuanguang"



The back of Hui Ji Temple's front hall has "The Conquest of Chen Yuanguang". Chen Yuanguang is the name of the main deity Hui Ji Temple "Sacred Duke, Founder of Zhangzhou" a famous general in Tang dynasty, who fought against bandits and quelled unrests. The man on the white horse is Chen Yuanguang, with both the flag of "Tang (Dynasty)" and "Chen (his last name)", from the saddle, hair of the horse to the terrain and vegetations are all made by bowl shards, which give layers to a complex artwork, the emotions on the characters and details on the armor are also emphasized by Sifus in order to make the scene come alive.





B. "King Wen and His Carriage"



The work is displayed on the arch connecting the main hall and east and west wing, this is a work of glass decoration and gray seam technique. According to the date marked on the work it was made in 1958 which means it has over 60 years of history yet survives in perfect condition. Both Shilin Mazu Temple and Hui Ji Temple's connecting hallway arch has artworks displayed, but the artworks displayed in Shilin Mazu Temple are cochin wares, a distinct difference between the two temples.

King Wen and his carriage works in pair with "Wei River" of Shennong temple, after King Wen ask Jiang Zi Ya to be his top minister, Jiang ask the king carry him on a carriage back to the city, during the trip King Wen went west for 301 steps and realized he went the wrong way, then went east for 507 step, after 808 steps exhaustion made him stop, which signifies the time of his dynasty, western Zhou dynasty for 301 years and eastern Zhou dynasty for 507 years, all in all Zhou dynasty survived for 808 years.

C.“Pavilion of Four Phoenix (Si Feng)”¹⁴

This artwork is made by cochin technique, the name seems to be miswritten, the original name should be “Pavilion of Four View (Si Wang)”. The story came from the 20th chapter of “Green Peony”- “Girls Hunt for Monkey on the Four View Pavilion” where Luo Hong Xun the man of the story saves Hua Bi Lian, the girl who accidentally fell in her quest to catch the white monkey. All the characters in the scene have their own gestures and distinct features and emotion, the thrill and danger of the scene was also captured, the clothing stands out from the background in order to show who the characters are. The vegetation of the scene was made by colored glass and jumps out when light shines on the scene.



D.“Antiquities”

As the name entails, “Antiquities” is a scene with vase, plants, fruits and curiosity, other than aesthetic they also contain a message of blessing and luck within¹⁵, it is a common scene in all three temples. Take the antiquities scene of Hui Ji Temple as an example, other than fruit platter and flower trees a distinct part of the scene is “implication of eight immortals” which implies the eight immortals by making their instruments part of the scene, such as ritual baton and traditional fan represent Cao Guo-jiu and Zhong Li-quan, both instruments are for good luck and driving out evil.¹⁶



¹⁴From *The Green Peony* ¹⁵Taiwan Cultural Memory Bank: Antiquities.

¹⁶Hong Kong Museum of History (Ethnography), 2009. The auspicious “Eight Dark Immortals” in embroidery, Ming Pao, February 2.

E. “Vase Antiquities”



This Vase Antiquities scene is displayed on the sides of the second floor of Wen Chang Pavilion. Wen Chang pavilion's main deity is the god of culture and literature, who represent the strife for knowledge and literary skills, and the gracefulness of the image of antiquities comes hand in hand with the quality of a literati. Unlike the previous antiquities image, due to the limits of the temple, space that can be used is compressed horizontally and vases and flowers with longer profile were used to ensure image fits, with clay as the image's base and painted over to show off the details and texture of the vase and flowers, curiosities such as fly whisk and scepter were also strapped on to the vase, although limited the space was utilized fully.

Shilin Mazu Temple



Other than the temple itself, Shilin Mazu Temple also has a stage area called "Pavilion of Loyalty" and has gone through countless renovations which grants the temple a variety of paste decoration.

A. "Old Man of the South Pole" and "Magu's Gift"



Old man of the south pole and Lady Magu are both deities of longevity in Taoist religion who represent blessing for a long life, therefore their stories are commonly seen in temples. Old man of south pole usually is placed on the left side of the temple while Lady Magu is usually placed on the right. For Shilin Mazu Temple, these artworks are placed on the ridge of the east and west wing, however they are created by different techniques.



Shilin Mazu Temple's old man of the south pole is made with bowl shards, only the heads of the old man and his young servant was made by clay firing and things such as the clothing of the servant, white crane, phoenix, clouds or the characters of eight immortals' wall and armors, horses on the front hall rooftop are all made from bowl shards to create a colorful scene. This work not only shows the intricacies of Sifu's skill, but also shows his sensitivity to color so that even the worshippers below can appreciate the work from far below.



Shilin Mazu Temple's "Magu's Gift" uses cochin technique for characters and animals instead, the most telling feature is the sophistication on the embroidery and creases on Magu's clothing, even the deer next to her seems lifelike. The characters on the eight immortal's wall and generals and their army on the front hall rooftop are also made from cochin, which made their armor and scenery more life-like and colorful in comparison to ones made from bowl shards, you could directly compare the two works to see the difference between the two techniques.

B. Glass Paste Decoration of the Stage Area

The stage area of Shilin Mazu temple was built in 1954, it contained three stages, "The Pavilion of Loyalty", "Dragon's Hall" and "Phoenix's Tower", during its time it was project of massive scale, even until now the stage area is one of the signature features of the temple. After several renovations, although the stage area bears the marks of time yet holds a classic beauty that makes it stand out from the rest.



All over the stage, we see the paste decoration of the eight immortals on the walls, dragons and phoenix on the roof and generals and officials in heroic poses. Not only are the eight immortals unique in appearance, the instruments and the mounts they have are also well established, so it takes true craftsmanship to create them. Take Li Tieguai's tiger mount as an example, to create the black stripes and yellow skin, Sifu interweave the colored glass to make the glass shard appear as black "stripes" for the audience. The deer of He Xiangnu were given black and white round glass shards to create the "spotted" effect just like a real deer would have.





In comparison to the eight immortals below the roof, the officials and generals on the roof has been exposed to the element constantly which made them appear cracked and weathered, such is the characteristic and downside of glass paste decoration as we mentioned before. We can still see some glass remain on the clay body, and time has only made them shine brighter, that is the beauty of glass paste decoration, these unshakeable clay bodies proudly declare that although they've seen the passage of time, they're still standing tall and proud!



Q: Do they have to work on the roof both day and night unless the weather condition doesn't allow it?

While working on the roof, natural sunlight is a must, it gives sifu an idea on what to adjust and what to change, so a sifu's job always ends around nightfall. Sometime when they're behind on schedule, they would go into overtime at night, their job mainly revolves around making parts that are needed for the next day, such as dragon's scale, character's clothing et cetera. They would take these small parts back on to the roof on the next day. Bowl shard pieces left on the roof after a sifu's job was completed.



Q: How are expressions on characters made in paste decoration?

Firing and clay shaping are used to create the face of character. The former utilize ceramic as its material and expressions are shaped by hand, ceramic's flexible nature also means that expressions can be more refined, high demand also means different schools of paste decoration create their own mold and hand stamp them to increase efficiency.¹⁸ The latter uses stucco and cement as material; and expressions are painted on which has more varieties, since clay shaping's base layer and paste decoration are of the same materials, it has higher durability. Night, their job mainly revolves around making parts that are needed for the next day, such as dragon's scale, character's clothing et cetera. They would take these small parts back on to the roof on the next day.

Picture on the left is "General on Horse", Courtesy of Sifu Chen Wei Ha, made in the 1980s. Picture on the right is an artwork taken down during the renovation of Hui Ji Temple.



Q: Why would there be marine animal paste decoration on temples?



Shennong Temple and Hui Ji Temple's marine animals on the roof.

Some characters, animals and objects exist in the temple because of their meanings or blessings, which mix traditional belief with art. Other than dragon, phoenix and character, you could also see fish, crab and shrimps. Most traditional temples were made of wood, which is susceptible to fire, therefore marine animals and the "water element" they symbolize signifies the wish that the temple can be spared from fire.¹⁹ Turtle fish commonly seen in every corner of temples also hold the same meaning, "turtle fish" representing one of the nine sons of the dragon king, in legend it has a dragon head and fish body, which is a water elemental that consumes fire²⁰, so it is commonly seen on different Chinese structures.



Mazu Shilin Temple and Hui Ji Temple's ridge can be seen adorned with turtle fish.

¹⁹Huang, Shu-cheng (2006). Express our passions by the stone: The image and beauty of the stone sculpture. Taipei: National Taiwan Arts Education Center, p.51.

²⁰Zhang, Qing-zong (2000). Jenn Lann Temple Tour: Take a look at the temple decoration art of Dajia Jenn Lann Temple. Taichung: Taiwang Nature Research Society, p.65.

Q: What are the techniques of Liu Hui Feng (Grey Seam) and Bu Jian Hui (No Seam) ?

There are two different styles of paste decoration, for our interviewee Chen Wei Hao Sifu, his style is what we call “gray seam” (Liu Hui Feng) technique, which entails that each shard must have space in between. There are a few upsides to this technique. Firstly, since shards are installed into stucco, the durability of the shard is enhanced. Secondly, since paste decoration artworks are viewed from afar, these gaps act as contour to make them seem more three dimensional at a distance. Master Sifu Hong Kun Fu and his five notable apprentices such as Chen Tian Qi Sifu all utilize this technique. As for no seam (Bu Jian Hui) technique cover the base layer entirely, known for its sophisticated cutting technique, things such as the character’s armor, animal’s fur are all finely detailed and create beauty with complexity, Master Sifu He Jin Long and his apprentice Wang Bao Yuan Sifu both utilize Bu Jian Hui technique.



Hui Ji Temple's "King Wen's Carriage", made by grey seam technique.
Each shard has gaps in between and are well contoured.



Cixian Mazu Temple's glass paste decoration artworks, made by no seam technique. The armor and flags are all crafted with sophistication, and the white outer frames of each shard were painted by Sifu.

7. Highlights of USR Project Paste Decoration Activities

2022/10/07

"Traditional Architecture in Everyday Life: Appreciation of the Art of Paste Decoration and the Practice of Paste Decoration in Community Construction"



2022/10/08

"Traditional Architecture in Everyday Life:
Paste Decoration Workshop"

