
Origin and development of ceramic ridges in Lingnan traditional architecture

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Abstract: The ceramic ridge of Lingnan traditional architecture originated in Song Dynasty, matured in Qing Dynasty, which was a unique decoration in Lingnan traditional architecture. According to research, there are remains of Lingnan traditional ceramic ridges in many domestic and overseas sites, such as Guangdong, Guangxi, Hongkong, Macao, Thailand, Burma, Vietnam and Singapore. Among them, Chen Clan Academy, Foshan Ancestral Temple, Sanshui Xujiang Temple, Deqing Yuecheng Dragon Mother Temple are representative. Most of the existing ceramic ridges were made in the late Qing Dynasty, presenting a demonstration for mature stage of Lingnan ceramic ridges.

By using space observation technology, we described the spread routine of Lingnan traditional ceramic ridges. Through statistical research of the existing Lingnan traditional ceramic ridges at home, the developing and spreading track of Lingnan traditional ceramic ridges was roughly obtained. Lingnan traditional ceramic ridges were created by Shiwan Kiln in Song Dynasty, widely used in Cantonese region in late Qing dynasty, then spread to domestic and Southeast Asia area by water way, land way and ocean shipping routes. In this article, the status of ceramic ridges in Lingnan architectural decorations, the spreading and influence routes of ceramic ridges, relation between ceramic ridges and antique ridges, evolution of subjects and expression techniques of ceramic ridges were deeply discussed.

Key words: Ceramic ridge, origin and development, spreading routine, Shiwan Kiln, Cantonese region, subject

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1 INTRODUCTION

Lingnan traditional ceramic ridges, stemming from Song Dynasty and ripening in the late Qing Dynasty, is the particular decoration of Lingnan traditional architecture. Lingnan traditional ceramic ridges are specialties of famous southern pottery center – Shiwan Folk Kiln¹. During Qing Dynasty, ceramic ridges were widely used in main ridges(Zhengji) of halls, temples and luxury homes in Cantonese area, which were thereafter brought to Southeast Asia by Cantonese people. Many historic buildings decorated with Shiwan ceramic ridges are kept in Lingnan and Southeast Asia area nowadays, such as Chen Clan Academy and Zhenhai Building in Guangzhou, Foshan Ancestral Temple, Chongxu Temple in Luofu Mountain, Shunde Chen's Temple, Kang Wang Temple in Dongguan, Xujiang Temple in Sanshui, Yuecheng Dragon Mother Temple in Deqing, Gaoyao Academy, Zhaoqing Yuejiang Building etc,. On many temples and ancient buildings in Hanoi of Vietnam, Phnom Penh of Cambodia, Manila of Philippines, Kuala Lumpur of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand and Burma, ceramic ridges made in Shiwan Kiln during Qing Dynasty can be seen. Research by some scholars considered that the influence of ceramic ridges even spread to some areas in Europe and Africa.

According to the survey, the most representative remains of Lingnan ceramic ridges in Qing Dynasty are Chen Clan Academy in Guangzhou, Foshan Ancestral Temple, Xujiang Temple in Sanshui and Yuecheng Dragon Mother Temple in Deqing. Among them, there exist 11 Qing Dynasty ceramic ridges in Chen Clan Academy(Fig. 1); 15 Qing Dynasty ceramic ridges in Foshan Ancestral Temple(Fig. 2); 1 Qing Dynasty ceramic ridge in Xujiang Temple²; 5 Qing Dynasty ceramic ridge in Yuecheng Dragon Mother Temple³.

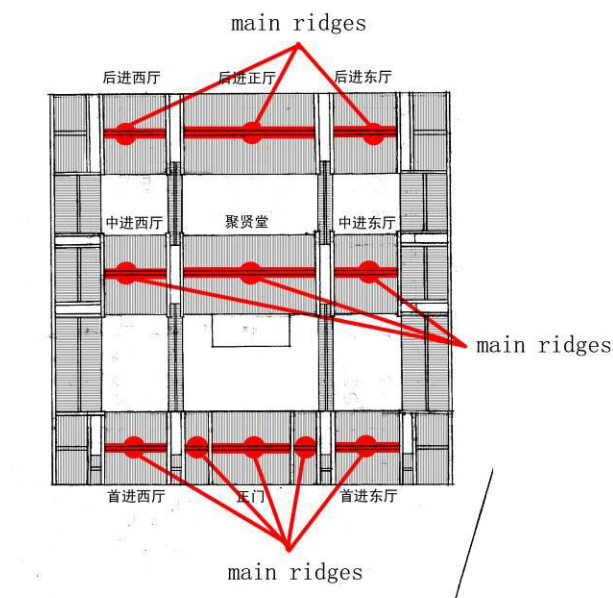


Fig. 1 Ceramic ridges map in Chen Clan Academy (Drew by the author)

¹ Shiwan Kiln is in present Shiwan Town, Foshan City, Guangdong Province, one of the famous folk kiln in Ming and Qing Dynasty.

² Besides, there's 1 replica of the original made in 1852, Qing Dynasty, which was also studied.

³ Among them, there're 2 ridges where the front side is original in Qing Dynasty, the back side is rebuilt one.

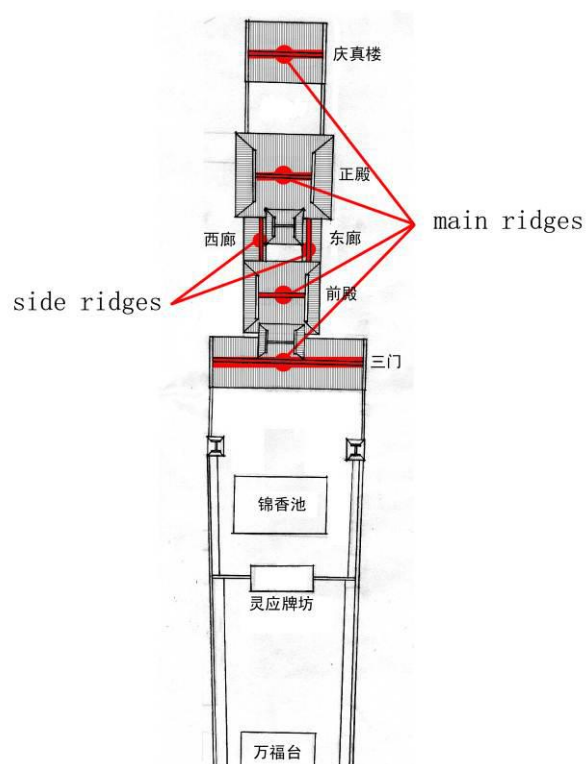


Fig. 2 Ceramic ridges map in Foshan Ancestral Temple (Drew by the author)

The earliest existing Shiwan ceramic ridge residuals were made in 1793 (Xujiang Temple in Sanshui); the earliest intact ceramic ridge was made in 1827 (in the court on the west of main hall of Lingying Shrine in Foshan Ancestral Temple) (Fig. 3); except for 2 ceramic ridges made in unknown date, the 29 ones were made in 19 years since 1888 to 1907⁴, which demonstrated the mature stage of Lingnan ceramic ridges in late Qing Dynasty.



Fig. 3 "Pine and crane" ridges on the western wall of main hall in Lingying Shrine, Foshan Ancestral Temple (photographed by Lv Tangjun)

According to the research of existing Lingnan traditional ceramic ridges, the developing and spreading track of Lingnan ceramic ridges can be obtained, preliminary discussion was made in respect of several issues.

2 THE STATUS OF CERAMIC RIDGES IN LINGNAN ARCHITECTURAL DECORATIONS

Ceramic ridges on many important buildings were fixed on the ridges while rebuilding it in late Qing Dynasty⁵. As

⁴ Among them, one ridge with unknown date has "X Xu XX" characters, so it's speculated that it's of Guangxu Years (1875-1908).

⁵ Foshan Ancestral Temple was founded in Yuanfeng years of Northern Song Dynasty(1078-1085 A.D.), the Lingying Shrine was built in Zhengtong Year Fourteen in Ming Dynasty (1449 A.D.) and rebuilt in Guangxu Year Twenty-five in Qing Dynasty(1899 A.D.); Xujiang Temple in Sanshui was founded in Xianchun Year Four in Southern Song Dynasty(1268 A.D.), rebuilt in Jiaqing Year Thirteen to Fourteen and Guangxu Year Fourteen

for three great temples in Lingnan area - Foshan Ancestral Temple, Xujiang Temple in Sanshui and Yuecheng Dragon Mother Temple in Deqing, as well as the Chongxu Taoist Temple which is called “the seventh cave paradise, the thirty-fourth fairyland”, ceramic ridges were all used to replace the original cresting material while rebuilding the temples in late 19th century. Thus it can be seen that the ceramic ridges had then become the superior building decoration in Lingnan area, it's popular to adopt this material, even folk houses such as Chen Clan Academy was proud to choose it as decoration. The status of ceramic ridge is higher than that of “lime sculpture”, which was also a famous decoration manner. It's a depression era for Shiwan ceramic since the Opium War to the establishment of People's Republic of China. Due to the weakness of national power and damage from wars, the number of Shiwan kilns decreased sharply and technicians dispersed. However, Lingnan ceramic ridges made great progress, replaced other decorations to become the superior building decoration in Lingnan area, and widely spread to Southeast Asia along with its magnificent and beautiful form. That can be seen as a miracle.

3 THE INFLUENCE OF LINGNAN CERAMIC RIDGES TO SOUTHEAST ASIA BUILDINGS

According to the records, we described the spread and influence route map of Lingnan ceramic ridges (Fig. 4). Figure shows: the remains of traditional Lingnan ceramic ridges in its birthland-Pearl River Delta are plentiful, while there are not so many remains in other regions. As for the spreading orientations, the main spreading routes of Lingnan ceramic ridge culture were westward and southward, while it seldom spread eastward and northward. The reason was that the Fuk Lo culture in Chaoshan region on the east was too conservative to receive external culture, the bad transportation conditions through Nanling Mountains on the north, along with the strength of Central Plain culture, hindered the ceramic ridge culture from spreading northward. On the west, it could spread to Guangxi region through Xijiang river. On the south, it could spread to Southeast Asia countries by sea. Its spreading in the whole Southeast Asia demonstrated the extensive influence of ceramic ridge culture, as well as the prosperous maritime transportation in Lingnan region.

in Qing Dynasty(1808-1809A.D.); the building year of Yuecheng Dragon Mother Temple in Deqing could not be verified, and it's rebuilt in Guangxu Year Thirty-one in Qing Dynasty(1905A.D.); Chongxu Taoist Temple in Luofu Mountain, Huizhou was built in Tongzhi years of Qing Dynasty.

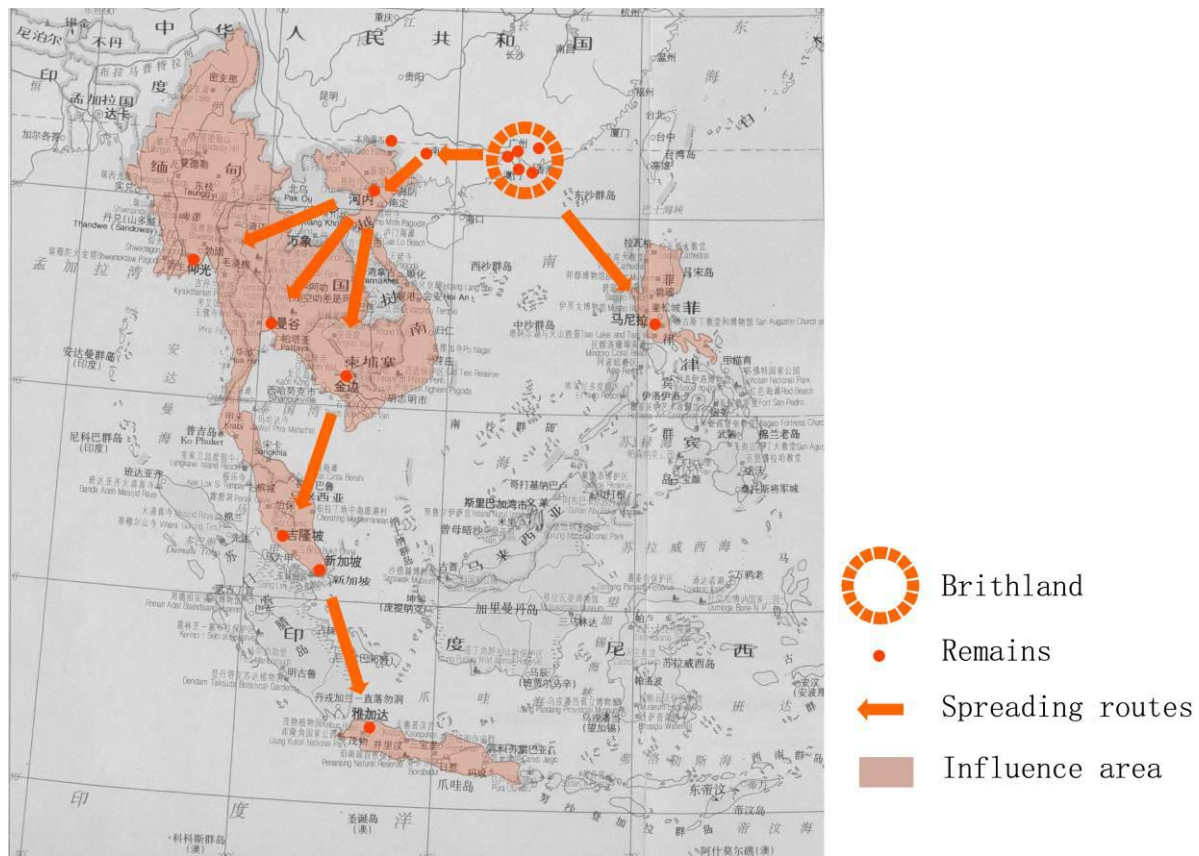


Fig. 4 Spread and influence route map of Lingnan ceramic ridges (Drew by the author with reference to “map of scenic spots in Southeast Asia”⁶)

4 THE RELATION BETWEEN CERAMIC RIDGES AND ANTIQUE RIDGES

Antique ridges were adopted by Lingnan architectures in late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty, prevailed in Lingnan region with Guangzhou as the center, and continued to Republic of China Period. According to on-the-spot investigation, among the existing clan halls and temples built in Ming and Qing Dynasty in Guangzhou, more than one-third of them adopt antique ridge decorations and amount to more than one thousand. The antique ridge decorations weren't of high ritual class, and were widely used in gardens, mansion, and temples in resident settlements. The antique ridges usually adopted lime sculpture modeling, with the main ridge consisting of ridge forehead, ridge eye and ridge ear.⁷ (Fig. 5)

⁶ Cited from baidu.com

⁷ Cited from “The antique ridge decorations in Guangzhou folk buildings” by Song Xin.



Fig. 5 Lingnan lime sculpture antique ridges (photographed by Lv Tangjun)

It can be seen from Fig.6 that the early ceramic ridges came from antique ridges, and kept ridge foreheads, ridge eyes and ridge ears of the antique ridges; some later ceramic ridges also kept the form of antique ridges. The subjects of the early ceramic ridges, such as flowers, fruits and animals, were similar with those of the lime sculpture on Lingnan antique ridge foreheads, with similar decoration position. Only on the main ridge(Zhengji) of ceramic ridges were antique decorations, which weren't on the side ridge (Kanji) of ceramic ridges⁸. This indicated that the antique decoration of the ceramic ridges came from antique ridges⁹. In another word, the early ceramic ridges were evolution of antique ridge on material, which replaced lime with ceramic to adapt to the hot and rainy climate in Lingnan area.



Fig. 6 Ceramic ridges in the court of Foshan Ancestral Temple (photographed by Lv Tangjun)

As time went on, antique decorations accounted to less proportion of the later ceramic ridges. In late Qing Dynasty, very few ceramic ridges adopted antique decorations in Pearl River Delta region, however, there still existed antique decorations in ceramic ridges in Zhaoqing, Huizhou region (Fig. 7). We guessed that in Cantonese region which was the center of Lingnan ceramic ridges creation and development, the antique decorations were replaced by decorations of other forms, while Zhaoqing and Huizhou region kept the ancient forms due to the long distance from the center. As for some famous ceramic ridge workshops such as Wenrubi, antique decorations never occurred in their works, as indicated that the artists did not copy the ancient forms and presented creative spirits. Ceramic ridges on the main ridge of the rear

⁸ The ceramic ridges can be divided into main ridges (Zhengji) and side ridges (Kanji). The ceramic main ridges are on main ridges of the building which can be seen from both sides; the ceramic side ridges are located on the eaves of the wing-rooms, which can only be seen from one side.

⁹ Antique ridges are main ridge decorations.

room of Wudang Palace in Sanshui Xujiang Temple were imitation of Wenrubi by today's workers, which took antique decorations due to failing to make a deep study, as we think improper (Fig. 8) ¹⁰.



Fig. 7 Antique decorations on the ceramic main ridge of the gate of Chongxu Taoist Temple in Luofu Mountain, Huizhou (made in 1907) (photographed by Lv Tangjun)



Fig. 8 Ceramic ridges on the main ridge of the rear room of Wudang Palace in Sanshui Xujiang Temple (photographed by Lv Tangjun)

5 THE EVOLUTION OF SUBJECTS AND EXPRESSION TECHNIQUES OF CERAMIC RIDGES

As shown in Table 13, subjects of Lingnan ceramic ridges before 1988 were all flowers, fruits, animals and utensils etc., while Lingnan ceramic ridges after 1988 almost all took people and stories as the subjects. The development of the ceramic ridge subjects from static flowers, fruits, animals to dynamic people scenarios was not only the revolution of ceramic ridge subjects, but also the revolution of Lingnan architecture ridge decorations.

As time went on, the expression of the ceramic ridges also continuously changed. The initial ceramic ridges were of demi-relief (Fig. 9), then of high relief (Fig. 10), and developed to circular engraving at last (Fig. 11). The style of the ceramic ridges was firstly simple, and developed to maturity in late Qing Dynasty, with perfect overall arrangement and proper density. Some late works exhibited a trivial and tedious sense.

¹⁰ On the main ridge of the front room of Wudang Palace in Sanshui Xujiang Temple existed one original ceramic ridge made by Wenrubi, without antique decoration, the ceramic ridge on the main ridge of the rear room was imitation of Wenrubi by today's workers, with antique decoration.



Fig. 9 Ceramic ridges on the left of the passage before Duansu Gate of Foshan Ancestral Temple (photographed by Lv Tangjun)



Fig. 10 Ceramic ridges "Muguiying takes command" in Foshan Ancestral Temple (cited from "*Foshan Ancestral Temple*")



Fig. 11 Ceramic ridges in Chen Clan Academy (photographed by Lv Tangjun)

6 CONCLUSION

The development history of Lingnan ceramic ridges was only more than 100 years, and its zenith was the 20 years in late Qing Dynasty. However, its exquisite art, profound connotation and creative spirit influenced Lingnan and even

Southeast Asia, Europe and Africa.

The spreading route of Lingnan traditional ceramic ridge culture reflected the open attitude, strong shipping power and profound culture influence of Lingnan in those days.

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