


# Research on the application of lion culture elements in lacquer painting creation in southern Fujian-Take the lacquer painting "Min · Lion" as an example

Jingyuan Wang\* , Hejing Lin, Jun Wei and Xiaobo Lian

Quanzhou Normal University, Quanzhou, 362000, China

\*Correspondence: 875864016@qq.com

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**Abstract:** *Background:* This study explores the application methods of combining Minnan lion culture with lacquer art from a lacquer art creation research perspective under the "14th Five Year Plan" cultural industry development plan. By examining the lion dance and lacquer art cultures with Minnan characteristics, this study explores how to solve the neglect of traditional culture. It promotes Minnan lion and lacquer art cultures to create a unique brand in Minnan. *Objective:* To use modern methods to improve people's aesthetics, enhance local cultural soft power, improve economic development, attract more people to enter the Minnan region, promote Minnan Lion Culture and lacquer art industry, improve the level of innovation in Minnan Lion Culture, and to ring positive impacts to the inheritance and promotion of lion culture and lacquer art in Minnan. *Methods:* Using literature review and practical methods combined with modern lacquer art creation theory for analysis. Summarize the lacquer art creation under the cultural elements of Minnan Dragon and Lion regarding their expression, humanistic value, and connotation, the artistic characteristics and market status of lacquer art, and the feasibility and necessity of combining the two. *Results:* Summarized the cultural origin and basic knowledge of Minnan lion culture and lacquer painting and explored the path of integrating Minnan lion culture and lacquer art. *Conclusion:* Analyzed the research on Minnan lion culture and lacquer art creation and integrated Minnan lion culture and lacquer art creation to complete the "Min Lion" lacquer painting creation.

**Keywords:** Minnan Lion Culture, Minnan folk culture, Lacquer painting, Craft and technique, Inherit

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

The lion dance is a folk custom and tradition of China's Minnan region. The lion cultural elements in southern Fujian have strong regional and unique characteristics due to the geographical ecological environment and historical culture of southern Fujian. Lacquer painting is the result of a long history of Chinese lacquer art. Its unique personality, beauty, material selection, and technique show its strong inclusive. However, facing the development and inheritance crisis in the 21st century, the status and value of the lion culture and lacquer painting did not receive due attention, resulting in its decline.

### 1.2 Research Purpose

Using the research on lacquer art creation under the southern Fujian lion culture, we can use modern ways to improve people's aesthetics, local cultural soft power, economic development, innovate southern Fujian lion culture level, promote southern Fujian lion culture and lacquer art industry's development, and absorb more people into

the southern Fujian region, for the preservation and inheritance of Minnan culture lacquer art.

### **1.3 Research Subject**

Through the research of lacking art creation under the southern Fujian lion culture, we can use modern ways to improve people's aesthetics, improve the local cultural soft power, improve the economic development, absorb more people into the southern Fujian region, promote the development of the southern Fujian lion culture and lacking art industry, improve the innovation level of the southern Fujian lion culture, and bring a positive impact on the inheritance and development of the southern Fujian lion culture and lacking art.

### **1.4 Research methods**

Based on the investigation of the cultural's origin of the Minnan culture and Chinese lacquer art techniques, the research of Minnan culture and lacquer art creation carries on the analysis and practice. Observation method: Observe and participate in the lion dance in southern Fujian, deeply experience and understand the lion culture in southern Fujian. Literature research method: Study the literature and obtain the corresponding information through literature investigation, and have a comprehensive and accurate understanding and mastery of the issues studied. Investigation method: Obtain first-hand information by visiting folk lion dance teams.

## **2. Literature Review**

Through physical activities, the lion dance culture shows people's wisdom and spirit in southern Fujian. It dynamically continues the ceremonies such as folk festivals in southern Fujian, carrying the "cultural memory" of the southern Fujian society (Yang & Mo, 2017). Lacquer painting originated from Chinese lacquer art and has a long history. As an independent ornamental Chinese lacquer painting, it has always carried the characteristics and connotation of the Chinese nation from ancient to modern times and contemporary Chinese culture, and its unique personality and beauty show its strong inclusiveness (Lin, 2012). Although lacquer painting cannot leave the scope of traditional lacquer art, modern lacquer painting is mainly represented as an art of spiritual creation. Many lacquer painting artists have begun to create and express lacquer painting in more diverse forms, giving its unique expression (Wang, 2023). Over time, modern lacquer painting has matured, playing a significant role in inheriting traditional Chinese lacquer painting techniques. Modern lacquer painting takes technological and painting characteristics into account. The creators should innovatively apply traditional lacquer painting techniques so that modern lacquer painting can glow with dazzling brilliance (Jiang, 2011). The identity and attribution of national culture make folk culture are important for promoting national unity. Fujian and Taiwan's traditional lion dance activity is a witness of cultural exchange and a valuable folk cultural heritage shared by the people. Therefore, we should focus on the inheritance and protection of the lion culture in southern Fujian so that it can continue to be passed on well and give play to its due cultural value (Yang & Mo, 2013).

## **3. Minnan lion culture summary**

### **3.1 Influence of Central Plains culture on lion dance in southern Fujian**

The lion dance, as a folk activity with a unique style, has been popular for a long time in China. It integrates acrobatics, martial arts, dance, music, and many other arts into one body. It is inextricably linked with Chinese folk festivals and religious beliefs. It has become a spiritual symbol for people to drive evil away, eliminate disasters, and pray for longevity and good weather. It is also an essential part of the festival. According

to historical records, lion dance activities were present/practiced in the Han and Tang Dynasties. Special routine movements and melodramatic performance forms appeared in lion dance, and full-time agencies and officials were set up in the court to take charge of management. After the Song and Yuan dynasties, the lion dance performance became a part of the hundred operas. It began to be carried out on a large scale in the folk performances. The skill level of the lion dance continued to improve, and a special lion dance team appeared.

Since the Tang and Song Dynasties, many immigrants from the Central Plains entered Fujian. They brought advanced production technology, colorful culture, and art, including the "lion culture" of the Central Plains. The Wind lion, the lion dance in southern Fujian, and the Quanzhou Line lion in southern Fujian are all unique regional cultures resulting from the integration of the lion culture in Central China and the culture in southern Fujian. The Ming Dynasty's "Zhangzhou Fu Annals" once recorded: "lion dance chi: fake kid, false lion, carved for the head of the tail, gold plated eyes silver paste teeth, playing the head and tail really tacit understanding, evening fast sweater put ears". This "lion dance" description is very similar to that of Bai Juyi in the Tang Dynasty's "Xiliang Chi". It is a fake lion with a head of wood, a tail of silk, gold-plated eyes, silver teeth, and a fengxun sweater that brightens both ears. This shows that the lion dance technique in the Central plains has not changed much since the Tang Dynasty. However, the main production technique of lions has changed from "carving wood for head silk and tail" ("Xiliangji") to "carving wood for head hemp and tail" (" Zhangzhou Fu Annals ") with southern Fujian characteristics, caused by the geographical difference between the north and the south in the production process (Figure 1).



Figure 1 shows a partial depiction of Su Hanchen's "Hundred Children Playing in Spring" during the Song Dynasty

### 3.2 "Fujian people are martial" is an important basis for the generation of lion culture in southern Fujian

In the lion culture of southern Fujian Province, the movements of the lion dance are simple. There are not too many fancy movements, and the technical style pays attention to martial arts display. All lion dancers have a solid foundation of southern boxing skills, often combined with the "martial army". It has considerable momentum, many participants, and a great relationship with "Fujian people maintain martial arts". There are many mountains and few fields in Fujian. The people can choose a living space suitable for their living. Most people live together in the township. They protect their production means and fruits of labor with the help of the overall force of the township. Friction and fights between villages occur occasionally to stabilize and expand the living space. For this reason, the villagers often conduct organized training to prepare for foreign invasion. This makes "Fujian people have been martial arts since ancient times, good at fighting, and passed down from generation to generation". The clan members unite and improve their martial arts knowledge/skill to protect their clan's and village's

interests, showing strength. Some clan members acquire martial arts and military training. These martial arts and formations have gradually become the important elements and basis of southern Fujian lion dance technology. It is one of the important characteristics distinguishing the southern Fujian lion dance from other forms of lion dance. In the form of training, the lion dance in southern Fujian highlights "performing martial arts with lions" and attaches importance to martial arts training. It also integrates martial arts and martial arts exercises into the "lion array martial arts". This form of martial arts has helped spread martial arts in southern Fujian. Before liberation, southern Fujian martial arts centers hired boxers to teach lion dance skills. So the southern Fujian lion dance into Taiwan after the evolution of specialized martial arts skills. Zeng Qingguo mentioned "lion dance skills" as: "lion dance, dragon dance, dance kirin and so on are entertainment, so it is also the category of national art". There is a tradition of not paying homage to teachers and not spreading the art.

### 3.3 The specific historical environment provided the necessary conditions for the generation of the Minnan lion

Certain historical things are the product of a specific historical environment. It is the historical connection that determines the thing's unique style. Therefore, specific historical things can be understood and recognized only by proceeding from the conditions of their times and analyzing their special historical connections. The formation and unique practice style of lion dance in southern Fujian are closely related to its regional culture and humanistic characteristics. It is also the product of a specific historical environment with profound social roots and historical origins. The high-pressure rule of the early Qing Dynasty "aroused the angry resistance of the people all over the country, causing violent social unrest, and the ethnic contradiction between Manchu and Han quickly rose to the main social contradiction, and the anti-Qing struggle all over the country was surging, especially in Fujian and southern Fujian". Based on social and political backgrounds, the open practice of martial arts was prohibited. Therefore, martial arts practitioners had to change their names, hide their martial arts activities, and continue their martial arts activities by establishing lion dance halls. The martial artists integrated some of the body and footwork in the martial arts into the routines of the lion dance during teaching. They changed the training of some martial arts techniques into fighting exercises between people and 'lions', to form a special form of lion dance in the name of practicing lion dance and martial arts, which has its system (Figure 2).



Figure 2 From left to right are Zhangzhou Lion Dance, Minnan Shisa, and Quanzhou Marionette Lion.

### 4. Lacquer painting

The language of lacquer painting itself has specific mysterious colors and spiritual dynamics. Adding the Minnan lion's cultural elements into the lacquer painting's creation can express and enhance these characteristics of the language of lacquer painting. It can explore and express the possibility of combining the cultural elements of the Minnan lion with contemporary lacquer painting. It creates a rich painting and has a certain sense of paint. It is realistic, decorative, and has abstract characteristics. It also

reflects a certain regional emotion. Combining the two will have a large plastic space and strong artistic performance characteristics. The lacquer quality is mainly reflected in the material of lacquer painting and the use of technology (Zang, 2006). Among them, the material is an important basis of lacquer painting works. Profound technology and flexible technical treatment are also important parts of the performance of the work. The two have an inseparable relationship. Meeting the "lacquer" performance during lacquer painting requires flexibly using the rich material language and technological means to play its artistic characteristics fully (Li, 2007).

#### **4.1 Commonly used materials for lacquer painting**

Compared to other works of art, the material used in lacquer painting is unique. It has a strong personality and appeal of artistic creation. It can produce simple, deep, elegant, and implicit aesthetic effects. Compared to traditional lacquer painting, contemporary lacquer painting focuses on transmitting the artistic conception of the picture. This artistic conception is usually achieved through the reasonable use of various materials for lacquer painting (Chen, 2002). Therefore, skillfully grasping material language's characteristics is the premise of completing good work. Various artists have explored and practiced lacquer painting on lacquer painting materials since it became an independent painting method. At present, different kinds of materials can be used for lacquer painting. The basic bonding materials include natural lacquer, cashew nut paint, chemical synthetic paint, lacquer paint, and tung oil. The inlaying materials include eggshell, clamshell, wire rope, gold silk, aluminum foil material, flash phosphorus, cardboard, horn bone, cloth, wood, and stone (Yang, 2011). There are also body materials, grinding and polishing materials, wipe cleaning materials, washing detergent, and dilutive substances. The different painting materials show different properties. Eggshell, sawdust powder, mother-and-pearl, wire, and string influence lacquer painting production (Guo, 2014). They provide the picture with detailed and natural texture, luster, and special texture. The special visual beauty shown is that other paintings cannot be reached or easily replaced (Pu, 2007).

#### **4.2 Main performance techniques of lacquer painting**

In the creation, lacquer painting pays more attention to the clever combination of painting and craft. Based on grasping the artistic characteristics of the picture, highlighting the special effect of the picture depends on the painter's proper use of technological skills. Firstly, a good structure must be coupled with skilled craft production to show the desired artistic conception. In addition, the performance techniques of lacquer painting are diverse. Common art decoration methods include engraving, inlaying, grinding, variable painting, and pile molding. Engraving and filling are artistic decorations in which a concave pattern is scratched on the picture's surface with a knife and a needle and then filled with silver ingots or lacquer. Inlaying is to inlay eggshell, cloth, gold, motherlay, and other soft and hard materials on the pattern. It is then painted, polished, and grounded based on material differences. This helps form different degrees of texture, color, luster, and other unique pattern effects. The painting uses pattern selection, mask dyeing, grinding, and polishing. Its expression forms include tracing gold, color painting, and halo gold. Grinding painting is to sprinkle powder, paint or gold on the finished primer surface so that the paint surface fluctuates. Then fill in or dye so that the painted image is fuzzier and more chaotic. Then create a pattern through grinding, making a uniform picture color. Change painting is when the paint is not dry. Use tools and materials to create a regular, random, natural texture or pattern. Pile molding is piling plastic patterns on the picture's surface with heavy oil or lacquered ash and other materials, such as relief and other obvious ups and downs, and then modifying (Wang, 2015).

Common Materials for Lacquer Painting	Basic materials: natural lacquer, cashew lacquer, chemically synthesized paint, lacquer paint, and tung oil. Materials used for inlaying: eggshell, clam shell, wire rope, metal wire, aluminum foil material, glittering phosphorus, cardboard, ox horn bone, cloth material, wood, and stone.
The Main Performance Techniques of Lacquer Painting	Commonly used painting art methods include carving, inlaying, carving, polishing, painting, and stacking.

## 5. "Min · Lion" lacquer painting creation

### 5.1 Creative Idea

The lion dance is a traditional national sports event with a long history and cultural heritage in China. The lion was an auspicious animal in ancient China, with a powerful appearance, vigorous action, and changeable demeanor symbolizing bravery and auspice. People believe it can drive away plague and spread epidemic in the New Year and bring good luck to every family. There are many kinds of lions. The geographical ecological environment and historical culture in southern Fujian have created diverse and rich expressions of the cultural elements and lacquer art. It has a strong regional and unique character. However, the status and value of today's Minnan lion culture and lacquer art have not been paid enough attention, resulting in their gradual decline. In "Min · Lion" painting, the selected lion images are the Zhangzhou lion array, the Fujian Wind lion, and the Quanzhou marionette lion, which are relatively unique in southern Fujian.

Zhangzhou Lion Array combines lion dance drills and military formations (commonly known as "lion array") and is a major feature of the southern Fujian lion dance. The lion dance in the Zhangzhou area is combined with the Bagua Formation. The lion dance drill is conducted before and after the formation drill. The "lion" runs and jumps between the lines to show various lion dance skills. The southern Fujian Wind Lion is a mascot that people put as "town house to ward off evil spirits". It has strong regional characteristics of southern Fujian. Influenced by the image of the lion, the traditional wind lion combines the image of the wind god and the lion. They have the same shape as the general stone lions, but they also have their specific characteristics, aesthetic values, and cultural connotations (Chen, 2016; Xu, 2008). For the Quanzhou marionette lion, the lion pays great attention to presenting its silly, cute, and wise side from the shape of the puppet. The design of the performance, action's expression, and many details are very particular, trying not to make people have cruel associations. The painting "Min · Lion" takes Minnan lion culture as the theme of creation. It depicts three Minnan lion culture types: Zhangzhou lion array, Wind Lion, and Quanzhou marionette lion. The three pictures' main body is composed of three lions' heads. These lions face the front, left front, and right front, respectively. They form a trend of left and right sides echoing to the middle. These lions have different expressions. The Zhangzhou lion array is calm and full of changes, the wind lion is seeking changes in stability, and the Quanzhou marionette lion is vivid. The three pictures are more flexible when combined. With certain decorative patterns, they are full of rich folk colors of southern Fujian. Thus triggering our endless imagination and pursuit of southern Fujian lion culture in history and space (Zheng, 2009). Therefore, the theme of "Minnan Lion Culture" is to praise the endless growth and self-improvement of Minnan lion culture. It is influenced by modern civilization using simple and far-away aesthetic values. It strengthens publicity and protection of traditional folk art socialist culture. It also reflects the significance and value of exploring and enriching the theme of lacquer painting creation.

### 5.2 Draft design

Lacquer painting "Min · Lion" triptych in the initial stage of sketch creation after determining the theme, with a simple black and white line draft to draw the first draft of

the creation. The original idea was to depict the dragon and lion dance competition -- the moment of the dragon and lion in the creative dragon and lion project. The main body of the picture was composed of two lions and a dragon. The positions of the two main lions and the heads were arranged in Chinese composition. The positions of the remaining dragon and the drummer were arranged according to the number of dragon sections and the distance between the characters in space to highlight the main and supporting roles in the game performance. However, after completing the first draft, it was found that grasping the dynamic depiction of people in motion was challenging. The picture gave people a dead feeling, not vivid enough, and there was no passion that a lion dance should have.

In the adjustment stage of the first draft, the original creative dragon and lion were replaced with more decorative meanings and characteristics of southern Fujian, such as Zhangzhou Lion Array, Wind Lion, and the southern Fujian marionette lion. The three lions responded to each other in three directions. Many decorative patterns were used to form an overall picture effect of the three lions. The color relationship determines the tone of the picture. For color matching, considering the atmosphere of the whole picture, warm colors were chosen as the main tone. At the same time, attention was paid to the black-and-white relationship of the picture, adjusting the local colors, making the black-and-white rhythm of the picture clear and stable, and the relationship between color blocks.

### 5.3 Production process and application of lacquer materials technology

The final effect of the lacquer draft does not represent the final result presented in the creation of the lacquer painting but is determined by the characteristics of the lacquer painting itself. In the creation process, whether the material is used properly or the technical level is good will directly relate to the painting effect's realization. Therefore, in the lacquer painting creation process, we consider different materials. We tried to carry out different artistic hand applications, flexibly integrating the painting effect and thus determining the final result of the painting. The selection of materials for the work *Min · Lion* is based on the picture's composition, the modeling characteristics of the cultural elements of southern Fujian Lions, and the content of expression. The simple and charming artistic conception of the picture is reflected through the creation of materials and techniques. In the creation process, lacquer painting produces several commonly used processes, such as homemade paint board - draft - embedding process - filling paint, painting line - paint - grinding - push light.

1) Homemade lacquer board. Select three whole synthetic boards on the building materials market. Cut them into required sizes and polish them. Fill the defects with raw paint and tile ash mixture. Wait for dry polishing. Repeat two to four times until the boards are smooth. Then uniformly brush the black paint once or twice, and finally, brush the varnish sealing layer to make a black lacquer board.

2) Draft. The finished lacquer drawing line manuscript was printed into three 60cmX80cm size lines. It was printed on three paint boards with carbon paper.

3) Inlaid eggshell, lacquer piled high. After the line drawings were printed, some linear parts with gold paint and color paint were stacked twice. Then eggshells were used to represent the teeth and eyes of three lions. The density of eggshells was used to represent the changes in the black-and-white relationship between teeth. The natural cracked texture after rolling the eggshell produces a simple aesthetic feeling. After polishing, it presents a valuable white, making the picture appear natural and harmonious. In the ready-to-inlay place based on the picture's requirements, brush on the transparent varnish at the bottom and put the eggshell down and flat, resulting in natural cracks. Use a carving knife or other tools to adjust the density relationship, create a virtual and real contrast effect and deal with excess parts. The use of eggshell material in the picture avoids the high brightness of the large areas in the scene and achieves the

ice crack effect of white primer pigment with better texture. It enhances picture's detail, highlighting its vicissitudes and sense of longevity. (Figure 1)



Figure 1 Shows the effect of inlaid eggshell, gold paint stacking height, and color paint stacking height from left to right.

4) Egg white stripe, big paint cover color. In the large-area color block expression techniques. Zhangzhou Lion Array uses the technique of gold paint and then covers the color paint and paste foil. Quanzhou Marionette Lion uses the egg-clearing cracks technique, and Minnan Wind Lion Master uses both techniques. (Figure 2)



Figure 2 shows the effect of small mask color, large mask color, and egg white streaking from left to right.

5) Paste foil cover paint and cycle repeatedly. After finishing the bottom layer mechanism, start to paste foil, cover fine paint, brush color paint, paste the foil again, and repeat the cycle four times. To coordinate the visual effect of the picture and improve the uniformity of the material, select transparent paint for cover dyeing based on image's color. Pay attention to the background color's depth and adjust the cover paint's thickness and uniformity. Multiple cover dyeing can be carried out locally according to the needs. (Figure 3)



Figure 3 shows the effect after applying foil coating.

Polish with different types of water sandpaper grinding. Maintain the picture's overall subtle level and bright sense through constant adjustment. After completing this procedure, evenly apply a little vegetable oil to the picture's surface. Then push the amount of tile ash and evenly spread it on the paint surface. Rub the vegetable oil and tile ash fusion with your hand until the palm is hot. Then wipe with fine mud limestone. After heating, the paint mask will completely melt, creating a brighter/better visual effect. (Figure 4)





Figure 4 shows the effect after grinding and polishing.

Burning foil cover paint, decorative background. The blank part of the background is coated with red brocade, and the silver foil is pasted. After the red brocade is dried, the foil is burned with sulfur paper and an electric iron. Finally, a thin layer of delicate paint protects the silver foil from slipping and breaking. (Figure 5)



Figure 5 shows the effect of very thin fine paint after burning the foil.

After mounting, the final effect of the lacquer painting "Min · Lion" triptych is shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6 shows what the final display looks like

This time, through the lacquer painting "Min · Lion" graduation design of the art form, to arouse the audience's appreciation of the painting. It also hopes to arouse people's interest in the lion culture. As the treasure of Chinese culture, Minnan lion culture is the source of national spiritual strength and has rich content in painting art. We can display the lion culture through lacquer paintings by combining figurative and abstract ways. We can think about the creation of lacquer paintings, artistic emotions and thoughts, and other related issues. They represent local culture and lose lacquer painting art's current aesthetic trend. It is also hoped that this form will give visitors a certain space to think.

## 6. Conclusion

In the late 1960s, lacquer painting gained attention when it appeared in the public eye as a unique art type. Like traditional lacquer art, the new generation of lacquer painting also greatly differs in performance characteristics and creative meaning. Although lacquer painting cannot leave the scope of traditional lacquer art, modern

lacquer painting is mainly represented as an art of spiritual creation. Many lacquer painting artists use lacquer painting in more diverse forms, giving it its unique expression form. Conversely, lacquer painters must improve their aesthetic consciousness and quality. On the other hand, they must constantly innovate the expression methods and subject matter connotations (Zuo & Bai, 2012). In the modern world, continuing to produce a wide range of composite materials for lacquer painting has greater development potential. To strengthen the local lacquer painting art in the face of the diversified aesthetic needs, traditional techniques and new expression forms, the use of new materials, traditional folk culture, and new ideas are the key/important for/to the development of lacquer painting.

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