

ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURE OF CHINESE THREE-TIERED STAGE PLEASANT SOUND PAVILLION

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Abstract

In the outer perimeter of northeastern quadrant of the Forbidden City (now known as “the Old Palace” *Gu Gong* 故宮) is a palatial compound named the “Palace of Living Out My Years in Peace” (*Ningshou Gong* 寧壽宮), a place where the Qianlong Emperor 乾隆 (1736-1796) intended to celebrate his sixtieth birthday and to which he would be able to retire after abdication. Within the ample grounds of this palace, constructed around 1770, is situated a majestic “three-tiered stage” (*chongtai sanceng* 崇臺三層) (or the “linked performance stage” *lian xitai* 連戲臺) named the Pleasant Sound Pavilion (*Changyin Ge* 暢音閣). This innovative theater is the only extant three-tiered stage commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor. Its construction was begun on this three-tiered stage in the thirty-sixth year of his reign (1771) and finished in the forty-first year (1776). It was renovated later in 1802 and again in 1891. This court theater reflected the heyday of Chinese architecture during the Qianlong reign. It synthesizes an unusually-majestic exterior architecture and intricately-designed interior structure.

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The scope of this article will cover an analysis of exterior and interior architecture of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion Theater. My goal is to use this extant three-tiered stage as a way to understand theatrical architecture during the Qianlong reign.

The three-tiered stage Pleasant Sound Pavilion was designed in the spirit of traditional palace architecture (Fig. 1).² Like other Chinese palatial buildings, it symbolized the supreme glory of the emperor, which in this case was the Qianlong Emperor. However, this theater is exceptional in the breadth and unity of its conception, as well as in the variety of design within this uniformity. In this article I will discuss the way in which the exterior structure and interior design of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion interact, as well as the extent to which each of its architectural elements conform to traditional Chinese architecture.



Fig. 1. Front view of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. Photo from Lang Xiuhua 郎秀華, *Zhōngguo gudai diwang yu liyuan shihua* 中國古代帝王與梨園史話, cover page.

² See the history and layout of each platform of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion in Sasiporn Petcharapiruch, "Marvel of Three-Tiered Stage Pleasant Sound Pavilion" in *Chinese Studies Journal*, Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University, No. 1, April 2006, pp. 185-218.

Like any traditional Chinese building, the Pleasant Sound Pavilion was built on a raised podium (*tai ji* 臺基), the integral center of the overall design of the building. According to Sun Dazhang, the purpose of the raised podium is twofold: firstly, to effectively waterproof the structure against dampness since most Chinese buildings are built of timber; and secondly, to conform to imperial aesthetics. The podium can give a sense of importance to the building, and its height must be in proportion to the rest of the building elements.³ The masonry used for the podium of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion follows the shape of the building. The foundation and podium of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion are modeled on the traditional method of building.⁴ As Sun Dazhang has noted, the more important the building, the higher the podium. The height of the podium of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion is relatively high. It is approximately 1.2 meters in height and is proportional to the height of the columns.⁵ Hence the high podium signifies an important function of this grand theater. However, the podium of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion is different from podiums of other Chinese palatial buildings in terms of its design. Looking at Fig. 1, we can see that the podium of the

³ Sun Dazhang 孫大章, “*Qingdai jianzhu* 清代建築 [Architecture during the Qing Dynasty]” in *Zhongguo Gudai Jianzhu Shi* 中國古代建築史 [History of Traditional Chinese Architecture], Vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 2002), p. 414. See also Wang Zhenfu 王貞夫, *Zhongguo Jianzhu de Wenhua Licheng* 中國建築的文化歷程 [Development of Chinese Architecture] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000), p. 120.

⁴ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 414. Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 120.

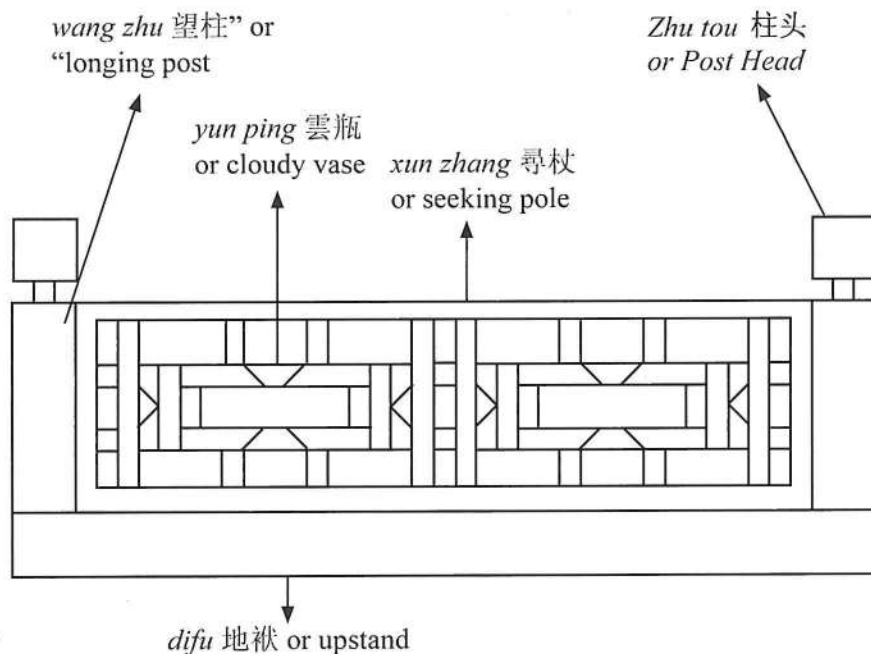
⁵ Information from a measurement I made at the podium of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion on November 11, 2004.

However, the raised podium of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion was built without any steps. I would argue that the simplicity of the podium of this grand theater is due to its harmony and balance to the upper balustrades (*lan gan* 欄杆). As Sun Dazhang has pointed out, when a podium is sufficiently high as to require balustrades, the design has to be executed with care so that they are in harmony and complement each other. The balustrades should be designed to enhance not just the podium, but also the entire building. Its proportion and detailing have to be worked out with reference to the overall design and the type and usage of building.⁷

In the case of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion, all three main platforms are decorated with intricately designed balustrades that harmonize the simplicity of the podium and accentuate the beauty of the grand theater. A balustrade of the Longevity Stage (*Shou tai* 壽臺)⁸ consists of upstands or posts called *wang zhu* 望柱 or “longing post;” post tops called *zhu tou* 柱頭 or “post head;” and infill panels or balusters composed of *xun zhang* 尋杖 or “seeking pole” and *yun ping* 雲瓶 or “cloudy vase”. The upstands rest on the *difu* 地袱, a stone piece with grooves to house the upstands and balusters (See Diagram 1). The balustrades on all three stages share the same design.

⁷ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 415. Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 121.

⁸ The Longevity Stage is the ground floor of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. It is three *bays* (*jian* 間) in width (or equivalent to 18 meters) and three *bays* in depth, equivalent to nine platforms of ordinary theatrical stages.

Diagram 1: Balustrades of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion

However, the balustrades in the Pleasant Sound Pavilion are different from those in other buildings in terms of materials. The former are made from wood carved, while the latter are made from stones carved with an intricate design. The upstands of the former are capped with simple design, while the latter's are usually capped with carved ornaments such as upturned lotus buds, mythical animals or other auspicious objects as shown in Fig. 2.⁹

⁹ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 415. Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 122.

A column or a pillar (*zhu* 柱) is another important structural element of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion that conforms to traditional Chinese architecture. There are twelve pillars built on the Longevity Stage, which are all constructed of hardwood. During the Qing dynasty there were five types of column commonly used. The first one is called the *yan zhu* 簷柱 or “peristyle column.” This is a column built to connect the side eaves of a building. The second type is called the *jin zhu* 金柱 or “hypostyle column.” It is a frontal column which was normally built in pairs in the front part of a building. The third type is called *chongyan jin zhu* 重簷金柱 or “peripheral column under upper eaves.” This type of column is built to support the upper beam of a building, which is usually constructed between the *yan zhu* and the *jin zhu*. The fourth type is called the *tong zhu* 童柱 or “short post.” It is a vertical small column built between upper beams adjacent to a roof. The fifth type is called the *zhong zhu* 中柱 or “king post.” This is a small post built to support a purlin beam, a ridge purlin, and a ridge tie-beam (Fig. 3).¹⁰ According to Prof. Liu Ronggao 劉榕高, an expert in traditional Chinese architecture in the Forbidden City, four types of column—the *yan zhu*, the *jin zhu*, the *tong zhu* and the *zhong zhu*—were installed in the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. The two frontal columns of the grand theater are the *jin zhu* type, while ones on the left and right sides are the *yan zhu* kind. The *tong zhu* and the *zhong zhu* columns were built to support

¹⁰ See more details in Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, pp. 404-407 and Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, pp. 85-87.

upper beams, eaves, and purlins to the roof of the Fortune Stage (*Fu tai* 富臺).¹¹ In the backstage of the Prosperity Stage (*Lu tai* 祿臺),¹² the *jin zhu* columns were also built.¹³

The section of the columns may be square, round or polygonal (from five to eight sides), rectangular or composite in section.¹⁴ In the case of the columns in the Pleasant Sound Pavilion, they are all square in shape. Like any other columns in Chinese buildings, the columns in the Pleasant Sound Pavilion were also well-seasoned before they were used for construction as insufficient seasoning would increase the likelihood of splitting.¹⁵

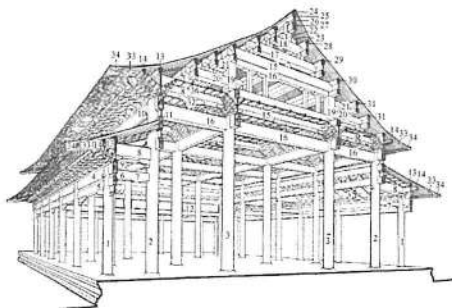


Fig. 3. Architectural Structure of the Qing Palace. Picture from Sun Dazhang, *Zhongguo Gudai Jianzhu Shi: Qingdai Jianzhu*, Vol. 5, p. 403.

¹¹ The Fortune Stage is the top floor of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. It is one-fourth of the size of the Longevity Stage.

¹² The Prosperity Stage is the second floor of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. It is one-third of the size of the Longevity Stage.

¹³ Prof. Liu Ronggao, personal interview, November 11, 2004.

¹⁴ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 404. Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁵ Prof. Liu Ronggao, personal interview, November 11, 2004.

1. Peristyle column 2. Peripteral column under upper eaves 3. Hypostyle column
4. Upper lintel 5. Lower lintel 6. Web plate between lintels 7. Tie-beam under peach-point beam 8. Peach-point beam 9. Plate carrying bracket sets
10. Lintel under upper eaves 11. Lintel carrying lower-eave rafters 12. Running-horse panel
13. Eaves purlin 14. Purlin under projecting eaves 15. Seven-purlin beam
16. Tie-beam under the main beam 17. Five-purlin beam 18. Three-purlin beam
19. Short post 20. Double-panel beam 21. Single-panel beam 22. King post
23. King post-fixing-piece 24. Ridge supporter 25. Ridge purlin
26. Web plate to ridge purlin 27. Ridge tie-beam 28. Upper principal purlin
29. Intermediate principal purlin 30. Lower principal purlin 31. Principal purlin
32. Intervallic bracket set 33. Eaves rafter 34. Flying rafter 35. Bracket set with end stretched beneath principal purlin 36. Coffered ceiling

The *dougong* 斗拱 or the bracketing system¹⁶ of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion is another architectural feature that conforms to

¹⁶ Joseph Needham has explained the origin of the bracketing system: "...it goes back in essence, as archaeological discoveries have shown, to the Shang 尚 dynasty (the 2nd millennium). In ancient times only the cross-beams were used, but as time went on it was found that this placed excessive tension at the junction between columns and beams, failures tending to occur there. The improvement was therefore introduced of inserting a number of corbel brackets between the top of the column and the cross-beam. The *dou* was so called because it was a block of wood resembling a capacity-measure in shape, and the *gong* or bow-piece was the double elbow-shaped arm supporting one of these on each side. Corbel brackets successively longer were then piled on top of one another at the capital of the column, so as to form what were essentially corbelled arches of wood supporting the cross-beams. The *dougong* branched forth not in one direction only but in both, i.e. as well parallel as transverse to the long axis of the building, thus supporting both longitudinal and crosswise beams." See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 138.

traditional Chinese architecture. According to Sun Dazhang and He Junshou, the *dougong* is constructed to give support to the large cantilevered verge and eave overhangs. They consist of many interlocking parts of timber to form a bracket. A set of brackets consists of four basic members. They are the arm-shaped members extending out from the façade of the building called *qiao* 翘 (curl or whorl), the bow-shaped members supported by *qiao* and parallel to the building façade called *gong* 拱 (post or pillar), the blocks placed beneath or between *qiao* and *gong* called *dou* 斗 (main block) or *sheng* 升 (secondary block), and the slanting members like birds' beaks in place of *qiao* called *ang* 昂 or "cantilever arm."¹⁷ The *qiao* may be used in successive tiers, each extending out a certain distance, called a *tiao* 挑 or a "jump." Bracket sets may be classified into a variety of kinds according to the number of "jumps" and the size of their component

¹⁷ Joseph Needham has explained its origin that: "In ancient times Chinese building technique had made considerable use of double slanting joists meeting at a point. But these inverted V-braces had at first little constructional importance; they were used mainly as an ornamental device between the longitudinal tie-beams, diversifying the appearance of the building as seen from the front. There was one employment, however, in which these inverted V-braces made a significant contribution to structural stability, for sometimes they were used between the uppermost cross-beam and the ridge-pole instead of a king-post. One can now see how easily the idea of the *ang* or "cantilever principal rafters" could have arisen; they were nothing but an extension of the principle of the *cha shou* 叉手 or "forked hand" struts to solve the problem of the widely overhanging eaves." See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 2, p. 202.

members (Fig. 4).¹⁸ Sun Dazhang has also pointed out that the functions of the *dougong* are twofold: to give support to the large overhangs of verge and eaves giving ample sun shading and weather protection to the building, and to integrate the structural elements such as the beams and columns with decorative elements.¹⁹ As a module, its composition provided meaningful rhythm.

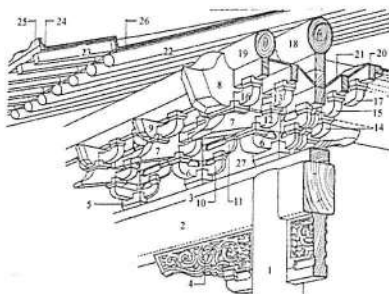


Fig. 4. An illustration shows the bracketing system of the Qing palace. Picture from Sun Dazhang, *Zhongguo Gudai Jianzhu shi: Qingdai Jianzhu*, Vol. 5, p. 408.

¹⁸ The Chinese manual, *Yingzao Fashi* 营造法式 [Regulations of Construction], published in 1103 A.D. records the *dougong* or bracketing system and its units of measurement. Basically there are four standard measurements, namely *fen* 分 (about 1 centimeter), *cai* 材 (fifteen *fen*), *qi* 契 (six *fen*), and *tiao* 挑 (about thirty *fen*). The proportion of every part of the *dougong* is measured in multiples of *fen*. The diameter of the column that supports the *dougong* varies from the column base. The *dougong* spread out in four directions carrying smaller brackets that may support others which spread out, thus, the whole bracketing system can be from one *cai* plus one *qi*, to three *cai*. See Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 410. See also He Junshou's 何俊壽 "Wangong yu mangong xinzheng 萬拱與慢拱新證 [New Proof of the wangong and the mangong]" in *Gujian Yuanlin Jishu* 古建園林技術 [Techniques in Chinese Ancient Garden], December 1983, pp. 58-62.

¹⁹ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 410.



Fig. 5 a. The bracketing system in the east side of the three-tiered stage the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. Photo taken by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

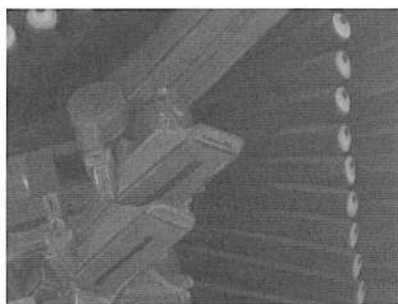


Fig. 5 b. The close-up view of the cantilevered arms (*ang* 昂) in the east side of the three-tiered stage the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. Photo taken by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

However, looking at the *dougong* system of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion shown in Figs. 5 a.- 5 b., we can see that the bracketing system is less complicated and less delicate. This type of the bracketing system is called the *dan qiao dan ang* 單翹單昂 or “single-curl single-cantilever

arm” system (Fig. 6). As for the types of cantilever arm employed in the Pleasant Sound Pavilion, the *wu cai dan ang* 五材單昂 or “five *cai* single cantilever arm” type was built on the Longevity Stage, the *san cai dan ang* 三材單昂 or “three *cai* single cantilever arm” type on the Prosperity Stage and the *wu cai dan ang* on the Fortune Stage. The difference of each type lies in the width of the cantilever arm. For three *cai* is equivalent to 0.50 *dou kou* 斗口 and five *cai* to 0.40 *dou kou*.²⁰

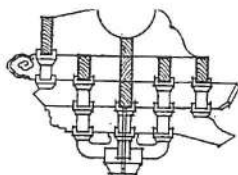


Fig. 6. An illustration shows the bracketing system called the “*dan qiao dan ang* 單翹單昂” or “single-curl single-cantilever arm” system employed in the Pleasant Sound Pavilion Theater. Picture from Sun Dazhang, *Zhongguo Gudai Jianzhu shi: Qingdai Jianzhu*, Vol. 5, p. 410.

Sun Dazhang has argued that during the Qing dynasty the practice of heavy structural bracketing was reduced. This change was basically one of aesthetic choice. The emphasis has simply been placed on the roof in a new way, which in this case is the triple-eaved gabled-and-hipped roof. This new form of roof now seems rather to float above

²⁰Prof. Liu Ronggao, personal interview, November 11, 2004. See also Table 8 in Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 411.

the structure then to be carried and flung out by the structure.²¹ Therefore we notice a different attitude in the architecture of the Qing dynasty, exemplified in the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. Looking at Figs. 5 a.-5 b., there is a monotonous progression across the building from one end to another, strengthening the eave line between uplifting ends over identical bays. The columns, tall and straight, make up a feature of indifferent verticals suggesting a small direction of movement or relationship to the whole.

Apart from podium, balustrades, columns, and bracketing system, the roof type of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion also conforms to traditional Chinese roof forms. Its roof form is called the “triple-eaved gabled-and-hipped roof” (*juanpeng xieshan sanceng yan* 卷棚歇山三層簷).²² According to Sun Dazhang, the most important building is usually covered by a multi-tiered, hipped roof which is used mainly for religious or imperial palatial structures. The more important the

²¹ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, pp. 410-411.

²² Generally there are four types of traditional roof: the gabled (*ying shan* 硬山), the hipped (*xuan shan* 懸山), the half-hipped/half-gabled (*xie shan* 歇山) and the pyramidal (*cuan jian* 攢尖). These four roof forms may vary to form two or three tier roofs with the combination of two or more basic roof forms. The half-hipped/half-gabled roof is also used for important buildings. The basic roof forms were created during the Han dynasty. By the Qing dynasty these were developed to create many variations of roof. The pyramidal was built in various forms of geometry such as round, square, pentagonal, hexagonal and octagonal. Round roofs were used for religious buildings, square for pavilions and octagonal for pagodas. See more details in Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 402 and Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 75.

building the more tiers of roof it has.²³ Thus the number of multiple roofs of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion reinforces the significance of its functional architecture. The exaggerated upturn of the corners of the eaves also accentuates the aesthetic refinement of the sublime treatment of the grand theater.

Roof decoration and design of traditional Chinese architecture are not confined to the sculptural elements displayed on the roof ridges and corners. The roof form, tile design and ornaments are also integral to its effect. As for roof tiles, there are basically two main types of tiles: “flat” and “cylindrical.” The former are slightly curved and somewhat wider than the latter. They are laid overlapping one another vertically down the roof slope to form rows. They are classified into three types: *ban wa* 板瓦, used as under-layer tiles, *zhiyao banwa* 直腰板瓦, used as under layer-tiles near the roof ridge, and *di shui* 滴水 used as edge tiles. The cylindrical tiles, which are, in fact, semi-cylindrical, are laid end to end overlapping the two sides of each row of flat tiles forming ridges. They are divided into two types: *tian goutou* 天溝頭, used for channeling water and *gou tou* 溝頭, used as edge tiles.²⁴

The roof tiles of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion are of both flat and cylindrical types. They were placed in different parts of the roof. These roof tiles are called “glazed tiles” (*liuli wa* 琉璃瓦). The colors of tiles range from yellow to green. Here yellow and green tiles are placed

²³ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 402. Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁴ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 412. Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 78.

on the roofs of all three floors of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. Two-thirds of the eave section of the roofs on the Longevity Stage and the Prosperity Stage are covered with yellow glazed tiles, while one-third of the rear part is contrasted with green glazed tiles. However, the eaves of the hipped roof on the Fortune Stage are covered with yellow glazed tiles, while the top part is decorated with green glazed tiles. According to Prof. Liu Ronggao, this is called the *lu liuli wa huang jianbian* 綠琉璃瓦黃剪邊 or “green glazed tiles with yellow border.” Interestingly, colors of roof tiles of the Loge of Inspecting Truth on the opposite side are in a reverse order. The hipped roof of this audience hall is primarily covered with yellow glazed tiles and green glazed tiles on its eave and ridge. This is called the *huang liuli wa lu jianbian* 黃琉璃瓦綠剪邊 or “yellow glazed tiles with green border.”²⁵

What is the philosophy behind this distinction? The distinction lies in a symbolic meaning of color scheme in Chinese philosophy. Prof. Liu Ronggao has explained that both prior to and during the Qing dynasty, yellow was used exclusively for the royal families. Therefore the majority of yellow glazed tiles employed on the hipped roof of the Loge of Inspecting the Truth (*Yueshi Lou* 閱是樓) connote this meaning (Fig. 7). For the Loge was used as a “royal box” where the emperor was seated in the center to watch drama performances. Thus yellow glazed tiles on its roof signify that this audience hall was an imperial residence. In China it was taboo to have something in common with emperors.

²⁵ Prof. Liu Ronggao, personal interview, November 11, 2004.

Thus the triple-eaved gabled-and-hipped roof on the Pleasant Sound Pavilion had to be built with green glazed tiles. However, the yellow tiles on the eaves and ridges denote that this grand theater was exclusively for imperial use.²⁶



Fig. 7. Side view of the Loge of Inspecting Truth. Photo from Lang Xiuhua, *Zhongguo Gudai Diwang yu Liyuan Shihua*, cover page.

Ornamentation of the roof in traditional Chinese architecture invariably was required to satisfy practical as well as aesthetic needs. Seamless integration of these two often conflicting requirements was necessary to achieve the highest standards. Roof decoration of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion was followed generally according to this principle, and decoration was applied where it was structurally needed. Like roof decoration of any traditional Chinese buildings, the Pleasant Sound Pavilion also has *wen shou* 吻獸, “kissing animals” or “roof ornaments” on the roof ridges or corner ribs.²⁷

²⁶ Prof. Liu Ronggao, personal interview, November 11, 2004.

²⁷ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 412. See also Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 80.

There are various types of *wen*. The ones on the main ridge finials are called *zhengwen* 正吻 (Fig. 8). That on the roof corner rib is named *chui shou* 垂獸 or “drooping animal” situated on a *shou zuo* 獸座 or “animal seat” (Fig. 9). A series of mythological figures placed in front of the *chui shou* are called *zou shou* 走獸 or “parading animals.” The more important a building is the more roof animal ornaments it has. Thus to highlight the important aspect of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion, there are five, seven, and nine “kissing animals” on the roof ridges of the Longevity Stage, the Prosperity Stage, and the Fortune Stage, respectively. Five of these roof ornaments on the Longevity Stage range from outer to inner parts: *xian ren* 仙人 (a hen with an immortal astride) (Fig. 10), *long* 龍 (dragon) (Fig. 11), *feng* 鳳 (phoenix) (Fig. 12), *shi* 獅 (lion) (Fig. 13), and *chui shou* (a bushy-tailed dragon) (Fig. 9). Two of the roof ornaments added on the roof ridge of the Prosperity Stage are *hai ma* 海馬 (sea horse) (Fig. 14) and *tian ma* 天馬 (winged or celestial horse) (Fig. 15). The extra two on the roof ridge of the Fortune Stage are *ya yu* 押魚 (Fig. 16) and *suan ni* 狻猊 (scaled lion) (Fig. 17). The order of mythological figurines decorated on the roofs of the three platforms is shown below (from outer to inner).

The Longevity Stage: an immortal riding a hen, dragon, phoenix, lion, and a bushy-tailed dragon

The Prosperity Stage: an immortal riding a hen, dragon, phoenix, lion, sea horse, celestial horse, and a bushy-tailed dragon

The Fortune Stage: an immortal riding a hen, dragon, phoenix, lion, sea horse, celestial horse, *ya yu*, scaled lion, and a bushy-tailed dragon

These figurines of roof ridges serve a structural function as well as an ornamental purpose. Sun Dazhang has argued that since the upper sloping ridges were built at a sharp angle, they presented a weak link at a vital point in the construction and could easily slide free. To solve this problem, during the construction iron bars were inserted at the lower end of each ridge to strengthen the structural member. Ornamental animals were then stuck onto the ridges to hide the protruding ends of the bars. The silhouettes of these rising and falling figures also serve to break the sense of monotony of the roof. He has also pointed out that all are composite animals embodying propitious and protective qualities and should occur only as an odd numbered set.²⁸



Fig. 8. *zhengwen* 正吻 or “main kissing animals”

²⁸ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 412. See also Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 80.



shou zuo 獸座 or “animal’s seat”

Fig. 9. *chui shou* 垂獸 or “drooping animal” situated on a *shou zuo* 獸座 or “animal’s seat”



Fig. 10. *xian ren* 仙人 or “immortal”



Fig. 11. *long* 龍 or “dragon”



Fig. 12. *feng* 鳳 or “phoenix”



Fig. 13. *shi* 獅 or “lion”



Fig. 14. *hai ma* 海馬 or “sea horse”



Fig. 15. *tian ma* 天馬 or “winged or celestial horse”

Fig. 16. *ya yu* 押魚Fig. 17. *suan ni* 狻猊 or “scaled lion”

Another structural element in the Pleasant Sound Pavilion that conforms to traditional Chinese architecture is its highly-decorative ceiling. There are basically two types of ceiling built in traditional Chinese buildings. The first type is called *tianhua* 天花 or “celestial flower.” It is a false ceiling created by battens with finishing battens or boardings. The second is called *zaojing* 藻井 or “caisson” (literally “decorative well”). It is applied on a coffered ceiling of a palace to give lend meaning to the interior space. The caissons are usually constructed in several tiers which range from square to circular.²⁹ The Pleasant Sound Pavilion was built with both kinds of ceiling. The ceilings of all three stages are the *tianhua* type (Fig. 18). These coffered ceilings are decorated with a repeated pattern of five circular crimson bats surrounding the Chinese character “*shou* 壽” or “longevity” with four flying cranes mouthing peaches at each corner. Here five bats represent the five blessings: health, long life, prosperity, love of virtue, and a

²⁹ Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 84.

tranquil, natural death.³⁰ The crane also is a symbol of longevity. This kind of decoration is called “five bats carrying longevity” (*wufu pengshou* 五蝠捧壽).³¹

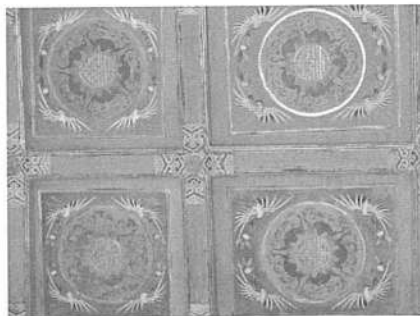


Fig. 18. The *tianhua* 天花 ceiling with a decoration pattern called “five bats carrying longevity” (*wufu pengshou* 五蝠捧壽). Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.



Fig. 19. Close-up view of a large *tianjing* on the middle of the ceiling of the Longevity Stage. Photo taken inside the Longevity Stage of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

³⁰ The Chinese word for bat is *fu* 蝠 is a homophone with the word *fu* 福 which means fortune. See more discussion in Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 112.

³¹ Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 113.

Furthermore, an indentation in a square shape in the center of the ceiling of the Longevity Stage, which forms the *tianjing*, is the *zaojing* type (Fig. 19). This square caisson on a coffered ceiling is constructed by intersecting laths at 90 degrees. The panels set in between the laths are painted with a floating cloud motif around a square caisson with a decoration of paired dragons rotating around a signet. This kind of decoration is called “golden dragon with a signet” (*jinlong hexi* 金龍和璽), which was a new decorative design in the Qing dynasty.³² In China, the dragon is a symbol of the Emperor, the Son of Heaven. In this case it also alludes to the Dragons in the Heaven. In the Loge of Inspecting Truth sat the Dragon of the Earth, or the emperor. The three dragons echoed each other and constituted a sacred atmosphere.

Not only is the interior decoration of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion designed exquisitely, but its exterior decoration is also eye-catching. One of the most interesting exterior decorations of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion is an inscription of Chinese characters on wooden boards and pillars. There are three horizontal wooden boards hanging from frontal eaves on each stage. Each board is decorated with a Chinese character inscription whose meaning can be interpreted when read downwards. Another one on the Fortune Stage reads “Pleasant Sound Pavilion” (*Changyin Ge* 暢音閣); the other on the Prosperity Stage reads “Leading harmony and cheering peace” (*Daohe Yitai* 導和怡

³² Wang Zhenfu, *ibid.*, p. 113.

泰); and the one on the Longevity Stage reads “Heaven proclaims happiness” (*Hutian Xuanyu* 壺天宣豫). Of such inscriptions, the most eye-catching one is a pair of paralleled sentences (*dui lian* 對聯) inscribed on the front two pillars of the Longevity Stage. It reads as follows:

動靜叶清音知水仁山隨所會

春秋富佳日鳳歌鸞舞適其機

Motion and quietude harmonize pure sound; wise water and benevolent mountain follow what they meet.

Spring and autumn are full of auspicious days; phoenix song and luan dance suit their occasion.

Thus we can see that every structural element of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion-- podium, balustrade, column, beam, bracketing system, roof form, roof tiles, roof decoration, ceiling, inscribed and gilt wooden boards—is consistent with traditional Chinese architectural style. However, one unique and innovative feature of traditional Chinese palace-style architecture applied to this grand theater lies in its use of multicolored oil painting decoration (*caihua youshi* 彩畫油飾). Sun Dazhang has pointed out that its greatest achievement was the fact that the theater successfully combined the dual role of preservation of the valuable timber components with that of enriching an already impressive structure.³³

³³ Initially, a monochrome coating had been used simply to protect the wooden structure from the extremes in Chinese climate and wood-boring insects. Paints were composed of plant and mineral pigments. But with the passage of time, a

Two styles of multicolored oil painting were employed in the Pleasant Sound Pavilion. The first style is the so-called the *hexi* 和璽 style (Fig. 20). This decorative style was employed in the most important buildings in the palace. Designs are divided into three main sections: *fang xin* 枋心 (“heart or center of the beam”), *zhao tou* 找頭 (“girdle or intervening part”) and *gu tou* 箍頭 (“encircle or hooped ends”). The *gu tou* occur at the two outermost sections of the composition on the beam, comprised of circular motifs within a board band encircling the beam. The *zhao tou* consists of motifs encircling the beam in a band with lotus panels on one side and zigzag shapes on the other. Side by side, these two degenerate into straight-edged parallel, zigzagging lines. The central and longest part of the decoration, *fang xin*, runs along the length of the middle section of the beam, and consists of long panels, terminating at both ends in the zigzag shapes mentioned above. Occupying the most prominent position, these registers abound with dragons and phoenixes in varied and lively postures. Any spaces between these three main areas are interspersed with floral or other motifs which, combined with the gilding and mainly blue color, produce a vivid and impressive effect. The regulations prescribed that if

renewed focus on ancient Chinese civilization and the development of colored paints, the designs themselves became part of the regulations to which palace construction was subject. By the Ming and Qing periods these decorations had become an integral part of architectural planning. See Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, pp. 452-460. See also Bian Jingyi's 邊精一 “*Qingdai caihua yiban guize jieshao* 清代彩畫一般規則介紹 [Introduction to Regulations of Chinese Polychrome Painting]” in *Gujian Yuanlin Jishu*, 古建園林技術 [Journal of Traditional Architecture and Gardens], December 1983, pp. 31-35.

blue was used for the upper structural timbers in one bay, then the colors should be reversed for the next bay, and so on.³⁴

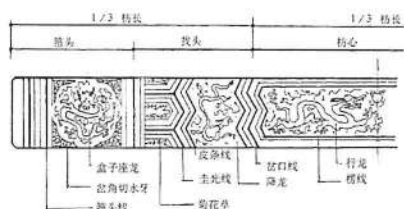


Fig. 20. An illustration shows each section of the *hexi* 和璽 style of multi-colored oil painting decoration employed in the Qing palace like the Pleasant Sound Pavilion Theater. Picture from Sun Dazhang, *Zhongguo Gudai Jianzhu shi: Qingdai Jianzhu*, Vol. 5, p. 453.

Looking at Figs. 1 and 5 a., we can see that the front beams on both the Longevity Stage and the Prosperity Stage were painted with polychrome *he xi* style. Gilt scrollwork is employed to fill the *gu tou* panels in the two outermost sections, both of which are painted with a motif called *hezi zuolong* 盒子座龙 or “curling gilt dragon in the roundel.” The four corners around the central dragon roundel are decorated with a pattern called *chajiao qieshui ya* 岔角切水牙 or “forked and serrate corner.” The sets of panels are joined together from parallel zigzag bands with a chrysanthemum painting and a dragon motif called *jiang long* 降龙 or “descending dragon” in the *zhao tou* section, which symbolizes the emperor. The *fang xin* in the central register is also decorated with a pair of gilt dragons called *xing long* 行龙 or “walking dragon.”³⁵

³⁴ See Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, pp. 452-460 and Bian Jingyi, *ibid.*, pp. 31-35.

³⁵ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, pp. 453-454 and Bian Jingyi, *ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

Another multicolored oil painting style employed in the Pleasant Sound Pavilion is the so-called *Suzhou* 蘇州 style. This decorative style finds its individuality in the *fang xin*, or central section, although not completely divorced from the overall structure of the *hexi* style. Falling into two board categories, the *fang xin* is either bounded by a long panel or, more uniquely, large semi-circular panels painted at the center of one, two or even three tie beams laid one on top of the other. A border folding line is obtained by shading to give a three-dimensional effect. The *zhao tou* sections often bear panels in fan, gourd or other shapes. These apart, the truly unique character of Suzhou-style decoration lies in the repertoire of subjects and motifs as well as the lyrical style in which they are executed.³⁶

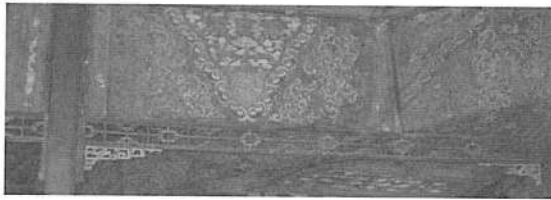


Fig. 21 a. The Suzhou 蘇州 style of multicolored oil painting on the upper beam of the inner cave in the Longevity Stage. Photo taken by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

³⁶ Sun Dazhong has explained that the majority of the Suzhou-style colored paintings date to the middle of the Qing period and later, such as those found in the Qianlong garden and other imperial gardens. During the later years of the Qing dynasty, the structural members of the east and west palaces of the inner court were also covered with this kind of colored decoration. Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, pp. 455-456 and Bian Jingyi, *ibid.*, pp. 33-34.



Fig. 21 b. The Suzhou style of multicolored oil painting on the corner girder of the inner eave in the Longevity Stage. Photo taken by Sasiporn Petcharapiruch on November 11, 2004.

The Suzhou-style of multicolored oil painting decoration is applied to corner girders and beams of the inner eaves in the Longevity Stage and the Prosperity Stage. Looking at Figs. 21 a.- 21 b. we can see that in contrast to the *hexi* style paintings on the exterior beams of the Longevity Stage and the Prosperity Stage, the main characteristic of these girders and beams is of a painterly style, reproducing favorite themes of traditional brush and ink landscape painting. Here the curled neck ruff pattern, which is called *yanyun baofu* 煙雲包袱 or “cloud wrapper”³⁷ meticulously painted in different tones from dark to light, borders the central *fang xin* panel, which is painted in a cloud motif. Symbolically the Longevity Stage is represented as a human realm with the Heaven above. The *gu tou* and *zhao tou* registers on both sides are decorated with naturalistic sprays of lotus flowers. These polychrome decorative styles all use blue and green as the predominant colors,

³⁷ Sun Dazhang, *ibid.*, p. 455 and Bian Jingyi, *ibid.*, p. 33.

enriching this already magnificent aspect of the theatrical stage the Pleasant Sound Pavilion.

In conclusion, Chinese three-tiered stage Pleasant Sound Pavilion has its unique features that conform to and diverge from traditional Chinese architecture standards. As I have analyzed elsewhere, the three-tiered stage was architecturally theatricalized with several elements. It consisted of one underground and four performative platforms, namely the Longevity Stage, the Immortal Tower (*Xian lou* 仙樓), the Prosperity Stage, and the Fortune Stage. These four platforms were innovatively equipped with theatrical mechanism, such as *tianjing* 天井, *dijing* 地井, *cha duo* 磗垛, entrance doors (*shang chang men* 上場門), exit doors (*xia chang men* 下場門), movable covered boards, bridges, and handspike windlasses, all of which allow the mobility and dynamism of actors in gala performances.³⁸ In spite of its uniqueness and ingenuity, the Pleasant Sound Pavilion was designed in the spirit of traditional palace architecture. Every element of its exterior structure and interior design—podium, balustrades, columns, ceilings, bracketing systems, and roof shape, tiles, and decorations—reflects traditional Chinese architectural standards. Therefore, this three-tiered stage is exceptional in the breadth and unity of its conception, as well as in the variety of design within this uniformity.

³⁸ See the history and layout of each platform of the Pleasant Sound Pavilion in Sasiporn Petcharapiruch, "Marvel of Three-Tiered Stage Pleasant Sound Pavilion" in *Chinese Studies Journal*, Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University, No. 1, April 2006, pp. 185-218.

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