

# **The Artistic and Cultural Symbolism of Cloud Patterns and Water Ripple Patterns in the Decoration of Ming and Qing Dynasty Buildings**

Yihui Zhai

Xinyang Vocational and Technical College, Xinyang, Henan, China  
zyh312860531@163.com

**Abstract:** This research analysed the aesthetic, artistic values, cultural patterns, and symbolic meanings for which cloud and water ripple patterns have been used in the selected buildings constructed during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The study found that cloud motifs and water ripple patterns have been widely utilised in the architecture that prevailed during the Ming and Qing dynasties. However, rather than employing these patterns for aesthetic and artistic purposes, they have been largely used for the sake of cultural patterns and symbolic connotations. Although throughout the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the cloud and water ripple patterns have been used, however, as per the analysis conducted, there are some differences in the two dynasties. In the Ming Dynasty, cloud patterns were used for denoting Confucian and Daoist ideas, while water ripple patterns have been largely introduced for functional purposes. On the other hand, in the Qing Dynasty, not only significant advancements have been noticed, but also more dynamic colours and intricate designs were introduced during the Qing dynasty. In the Qing dynasty, significant emphasis was made on the spiritual and imperial symbolism that has been witnessed in the case of cloud patterns and water ripple patterns.

**Keywords:** Cloud and Water Ripple; Qing Dynasty; Ming Dynasty; Cultural and Symbolic Chinese Architecture; Artistic Value of Chinese Architecture.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

China has a rich history, where different dynasties have ruled the country at different points in time (Merlin, 2011). The Ming dynasty and Qing dynasty, which ruled the country from 1368 to 1644 and 1644 to 1912, respectively, have significantly influenced China from both cultural and political aspects. Taking into consideration different aspects of civilisation, the Ming dynasty is considered the golden age of China. This is because those having the imperial power during the Ming Dynasty have taken keen interests in art, literature, and distinctive Chinese architecture, and as a result, one could see that significant development in these core areas has been witnessed (Wang & Wang, 2023). On the other hand, in the case of the Qing Dynasty, which took over the country after the Ming Dynasty, it further contributed to the field of Chinese art, literature, and distinct architecture, as the rulers not only continued the policies of their predecessors but also introduced Manchu rules that led to the

introduction of new stylistic elements that reflect exclusive cultural and ethnic heritage. Both the Ming Dynasty and the Qing Dynasty have had a considerable impact on the architecture of China, as architecture created during this time not only served the functional needs for which such buildings were created but also, with closer analysis of the architecture created during the two dynasties, could reveal that they reflect unique symbolic elements, hierarchy values, and beliefs (Ding, 2020). The analysis could reveal that decorations were introduced in both the interiors and exteriors of buildings, whereas different themes have been taken from nature, cosmology, and Daoism philosophy. One of the dominant themes that could be identified with the architecture of the mentioned period is the use of cloud patterns and water ripples, which denotes significant environmental association, cosmology, and Daoism association (Wang et al., 2023). According to Liu, Zhou and Zhu (Liu et al., 2022), in different instances, decorative elements are considered superficial elements; however, the closer analysis of decorative elements used in the architecture created during the Ming and Qing Dynasties conveys cultural meanings, social connotations, and philosophical concepts. and Li and Hu (Sun, 2022) have pointed out that during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Chinese decorative arts have reached new heights of complexities and symbolism. In particular, the use of clouds and water ripple patterns in decoration has rich cultural context, a mystical sense, and aesthetic fulfilment. This research aims to critically analyse the artistic and cultural symbolism of cloud patterns and water ripple patterns in the decoration of Ming and Qing dynasty buildings. The research will analyse what the core motives of using cloud patterns and ripple patterns are as core decorative patterns during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The research is important as decorative art was more commonly used in the Ming and Qing Dynasties; however, they have not been thoroughly investigated in the existing literature. In particular, this research offered a unique insight into how the Ming and Qing dynasties leveraged decorative arts in building architecture, reflecting the artistic, aesthetic, and philosophical value of the two dynasties.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. Architectural Style in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

The building constructed during the Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty exhibits unique Chinese architecture that sheds light on the culture, aesthetics, and philosophical values that Chinese people were following during 1368 to 1912. Li & Yang, (Li & Yang, 2021) are of the view that the closer analysis of

different architecture constructed at that time reveals a more formalised structure that was in line with the Chinese hierarchical principles of Confucianism. Although (Mengjie et al., 2020) and Cheng and Tan (Cheng & Tan, 2018) are of the view that during the Qing dynasty, the architectural work created in the Ming Dynasty has been modernised, and it could be thus termed as the continuation of Ming Dynasty architecture, Yuan, Xu and Xu (Yuan et al., 2024) and Zhang, Wu and Jin (Xu & Puntien, 2024) have maintained that there are significant differences between the architecture created during the two dynasties. In this regard, Hanmo, (Hanmo, 2021) have pointed out that one could witness greater simplicity and symmetry in the Ming Dynasty, whereas greater emphasis was placed on the courtyards; the analysis of architecture during the Qing Dynasty could reveal significantly greater ornamentation with greater attention to intricate detailing that has been given to building architecture during the Qing Dynasty. An idea about the differences in the architecture conceived and created during the two dynasties could be created from the analysis of the Forbidden City, Summer Palace, and Temple of Heaven. Lai (Lai, 2007). The Forbidden City in Beijing is an example of architectural work that was created during the Ming Dynasty. Essentially, the architecture reveals an elaborated layout and axial symmetry that signifies the imperial authority of the Ming Dynasty (Hu, 2014). On the contrary, Zhang et al. (Zhang et al., 2024) have maintained that the analysis of the interiors and exteriors of the Summer Palace and Temple of Heaven highlights the unique features of architecture during the Qing Dynasty. From a careful analysis of the two buildings, Xu, Wei and Zhang (Xu et al., 2011) have maintained that these two architectures not only showcase advancement in decorative elements that took place during the Qing Dynasty but also greater integration with the natural landscape, largely influenced by Chinese Daoism philosophy, are evident from such architectures.

## 2.2. Evolution of Decorative Patterns

Although the decorative patterns in Chinese architecture reached new heights during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Yuan, Lin et al. (Lin et al., 2024) are of the view that all this did not start during the two dynasties. Williams, (Williams, 1976) have asserted that most of the architecture and decorative patterns during the Ming Dynasty were significantly affected by the earlier traditions of the country, particularly the Song and Yuan Dynasties. In particular, Michaelson & Portal, (Michaelson & Portal, 2006) are of the view that clouds and ripples were the result of the refinement of the art found during the Song and Yuan Dynasties. In particular, Yuan, Yang, (Yang, 2013) are of

the view that the nature and geometric work for clouds and ripples have been significantly influenced by the Tang and Song Dynasties, as it was this period that laid down a strong foundation for the artistic work in Chinese architecture. On the other hand, Yang Shao et al.,(Shao et al., 2022)believes that during the Yuan Dynasty, a blend of Mongolian and Chinese aesthetics has taken place, which has significantly affected the motif work carried out during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In particular, innovation in terms of decorative work was introduced in this period that was further developed during the Ming and Qing dynasties (Zhang et al., 2024). According to Zhang, Jing,(Jing, 2002), greater emphasis on the clouds and ripples was placed during the Ming Dynasty, largely because in the Chinese culture, the two symbolised harmony and connection with heaven and earth. At that time, Chinese Confucianism and Daoism were the two major philosophies that the mass population of the country was practicing; the clouds were used to establish connection with Confucianism while the ripples were used to symbolise connection with heaven and earth. Hu (Hu, 2014) and Ding (Ding, 2020) have maintained that although significant clouds and ripple work have been carried out during the Ming Dynasty, it was the Qing era when the two motifs got a more elaborate version. According to Merlin (Merlin, 2011), the elaborated version of clouds and ripples in the Chinese architecture during the Qing Dynasty largely symbolises the wealth and prosperity that China experienced in the era. Xue and He (Xue & He, 2024) have pointed out that the true nature of clouds and ripples has emerged during the Qing Dynasty, as new forms were introduced in the architectural work for such motifs, which include reverse complex colour patterns, paintings on glass, and more enriched aesthetics that could be experienced in the Qing era.

### 2.3. The use of Clouds in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

The cloud patterns in the Chinese culture have a significant connection with traditional religions followed in the country; besides, they have significant literary and art connotations and symbolic functions in the Chinese architecture (Jaiqi & Bo, 2018). As per the comprehensive analysis carried out by Yuan, Christian, (Christian, 2021), cloud patterns are deeply rooted in the traditional religious philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, which are the three traditional religions followed across the country. Confucianists believe that clouds denote good fortune and divine intervention, and many of the Chinese myths followed in Confucianism stressed the use of clouds as celestial beings. On the other hand, Wang and Wang (Wang & Wang, 2023) have associated the use of clouds with Daoism, as they believe that it

signifies harmony with nature. As the environment is an integral part of Daoist belief, the cloud patterns are symbolised in the tradition for emphasising nature and living in harmony with nature. On the other hand, Zhang et al. (Zhang & Zhou, 2021) have found that clouds are also having a strong association with Buddhism, as it denotes ephemerality and illumination, which are the essential concepts of Buddhism's existence. Furthermore, Lai (Lai, 2007) have asserted that clouds also have a significant role in Chinese classical literature and art. In the Chinese literature and art, clouds have been used as a metaphor denoting liberty and spiritual ascent. According to Yang and Rawson, (Rawson, 2000), such symbolic value that clouds enjoy in the Chinese literature and art has been translated into architectural motifs. Furthermore, Jaiqi and Bo (Jaiqi & Bo, 2018) has asserted that cloud motifs also have significant spiritual aspirations in the country, as they not only denote auspiciousness but also are used for emphasising sanctity. As per this author, it is such sanctity and auspiciousness that clouds are more widely found in the architecture of temples and palaces. This in turn dictates that cloud motifs in the Chinese traditional architecture go beyond aesthetic value as they have been used for spiritual aspirations (Cheng & Tan, 2018). The analysis of different building architecture where cloud motifs have been used applying different techniques. Usually cloud motifs are created through carving techniques; however, in the ceiling they are largely paint. Furthermore, Yang, Miller, (Miller, 2020) are of the view that glazed tiles have also been used for the cloud patterns. The authors found that intricate representations of clouds have been realised through painting and wood carving methods during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Wang & Ke, (Wang & Ke, 2024) have, however, suggested that different colours and shapes have been used during the two dynasties for symbolising prosperity and harmony.

#### 2.4. The Use of Water Ripple Patterns in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

Water has a significant symbolic meaning in the Chinese traditional culture as it not only embodies life but also denotes harmony and change. The water ripple has been used in the Ming and Qing dynasties largely because of its philosophical significance. According to Huang, Cheng and Huang (Huang et al., 2023), in the Daoism philosophy that prevails in the traditional Chinese culture, water has been used as a metaphor denoting humility and adaptability. It is such a connotation that water held that it has been symbolised during the Ming and Qing dynasties, where ripple patterns were used for denoting resilience and harmony as per the changing dynamics and conditions during

the two dynasties. In particular, Huo et al., (Huo et al., 2020) have pointed out that water ripple patterns symbolise dynamic harmony, and this is the reason that in the regions where Daoism was more prevalent, the architecture contains water ripple as an essential element. On the other hand, Wang and Wang (Wang & Wang, 2023) have found that water ripple also has a strong association with Confucianism, as water ripple not only denotes purity but also has been used as a symbol of moral ideal and self-discipline. This in turn means that water ripple has been introduced in the building architecture with ceremonial and religious connotations during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Furthermore, Ran *et al.* (Ran et al., 2023) have found that water ripple also has symbolic association, and such association has been widely utilised during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Accordingly, water is associated with prosperity and a balanced life. Moreover, Lei, Chunliu and Yahya (Lei et al., 2024) have found that significant agricultural prosperity has been witnessed during the Qing and Ming dynasties, and through the use of water ripple motifs, the rulers were engaged in communicative practices by symbolising water ripple with prosperity. Furthermore, Yuan, Xu and Xu (Yuan et al., 2024) and Li, (Li, 2012) have pointed out that water ripple found in the Ming and Qing Dynasties signified renewal and spiritual cleansing. The authors have pointed out that the association has been stressed during these dynasties as they were in line with Buddhist symbolism. There are different means through which representation of water ripple has been carried out in the Chinese architecture during the Ming and Qing dynasties (Zou, 2012). According to Yang, Xie, and Weidner, (Weidner, 2003), the most widely used technique during the Ming Dynasty was carving; however, engraving got popular during the Qing Dynasty, where ripple patterns have been engraved in wood and stones. Furthermore, Yuan, (Yuan, 2024) has pointed out that in ceiling and wall work, the most widely used form is paintings, where ripple patterns have been created with pigments that portray the fluidity of water. Wang and Wang (Wang & Wang, 2023) have also found that glazed tiles have been used for featuring intricate and reflective patterns.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

#### 3.1 Research Design

The findings within this research are based on qualitative research, whereas an interpretive approach has been adopted to explore and analyse the use of cloud patterns and water ripple patterns in the architectural sites constructed

during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In order to execute the idea of the research, the following are the different data collections that have been conducted in this study:

### 3.2 Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods that have been employed in this study comprised both primary and secondary data. The primary data is the first-hand information that has been specifically collected for this purpose. In this research, the observation method has been used, whereas four sites have been identified for the research to be observed for the cloud and water ripple patterns, which include The Forbidden City and Confucian Temples that were constructed during the Ming Dynasty. In addition, two other buildings, including the Summer Palace and the Temple of Heaven, have been observed for the architectural work as they were belonging to the Qing Dynasty. In addition to observing these architectural sites, high-resolution photographs of these four sites were obtained and analysed in the light of core readings and literature for this study. The process that has been thus employed helped in closely analysing the four architectural sites and the different motives that have been achieved while introducing cloud patterns and water ripple patterns in these architectural sites. In addition to primary data, the study also extensively benefitted from the use of secondary data and information. Such is the data that has been readily available as someone else has collected and analysed the data for research objectives other than what has been investigated in this study. For this purpose, two different sources have been used, which include historical archival documents that analysed the use of clouds and water ripples in the broader cultural and symbolic context. In addition, literature sources and studies conducted largely comprising peer-reviewed journals have been collected that provide greater insights regarding the use of cloud patterns and water ripples during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

### 3.3 Case Study Research

The research strategy that has been used in this study could be termed the multiple case study method, whereas four different cases have been selected and analysed. There were two architectural sites that have been constructed in the Ming Dynasty, which include the Forbidden City and Confucian Temple. In addition, two architectural sites constructed during the Qing Dynasty have been observed, which include the Summer Palace and the Temple of Heaven. The multiple case study research strategy has been adopted in this research as

it provides greater opportunities for analysing the core research theme through cross-case comparison and analysis.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis techniques that have been used in this research comprised iconographic analysis and thematic analysis. The iconographic analysis has been used for analysing visual elements of the selected case studies with a focus on the analysis of colour, form, placement, and associated symbols. While carrying out the iconographic analysis, knowledge and understanding of the Chinese culture and context have been observed. The process that has been thus employed helped in a more effective analysis of the four architectural sites, particularly analysing the symbolic elements and meanings associated with the use of cloud patterns and water ripple patterns in these sites. Furthermore, thematic analysis of the historical and archival documents and published literature and case studies has been conducted to identify and analyse recurring themes.

## 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings within this research are based on the analysis of four case studies, whereas two architectural works from the Ming Dynasty and two architectural works from the Qing Dynasty have been selected for analysis. Two cases of the Ming Dynasty include 'The Forbidden City' and 'The Temple of Heaven' have been selected, while two case studies from the Qing Dynasty include 'The Summer Palace' and 'The Grand Garden of the Summer Palace.' These four case studies are analysed in detail in the following:

### 4.1 The Forbidden City

The Forbidden City was constructed in the Ming Dynasty in the period 1406 to 1420. According to Yang, Cahill, (Cahill, 1978), the architecture was created with the aim of symbolising the imperial authority that the rulers were enjoying at that time. The authors believe that cloud patterns have been widely used in the architectural work that has been used to denote the emperor's divine authority. Carving and Dougong have been incorporated in a stylistic manner to signify cosmic orders and connection with heaven and the environment. The ceiling murals of the Forbidden City subsection 'Hall of Supreme Harmony' have cloud motifs worked out with dragons. Yuan, Xu and Huai, (Huai, 2019) are of the view that the use of cloud motifs in the 'Hall of Supreme



Harmony' denotes celestial power and harmony of the Ming Dynasty. Furthermore, the analysis of the Forbidden City could also reveal the use of water ripple patterns; however, unlike the use of clouds, water ripple patterns are less common, as it has been largely limited to decorative elements. In the courtyard, tiles and cistern ornaments with such water ripple patterns could be found, which, according to Yuan, Xu and Xu Sullivan, (Sullivan, 1954), denote purification and prosperity. Furthermore, Hu (Hu, 2014) have pointed out that water ripple patterns also appear on the surface of water storage vessels, which, according to these writers, symbolise life and renewal.

#### 4.2 The Confucian Temple

The second case of architectural work that will be analysed in this research is 'The Confucian Temple' that was also built during the Ming era. The temple was built to demonstrate the culture of the era, and significant cloud patterns have been used throughout the building. According to Wang and Wang (Wang & Wang, 2023), cloud patterns could be found in the room carving and ceiling top, where cloud patterns have been painted. The author is of the view that cloud patterns have been used to symbolise the Confucian spiritual perfection and the intellectual illumination. Yuan, Xu and Xu Sullivan, (Sullivan, 1954) have compared the cloud patterns found in the 'The Confucian Temple' with other imperial sites and pointed out that, unlike the royal palaces, the cloud patterns used in the temple are simpler as it has been primarily introduced to reflect Confucian restraint and scholar pursuit. This in turn dictates that rather than simply using cloud patterns in the temple for the sake of aesthetics, it has been largely used for its symbolic value within Confucian philosophy, practiced during the Ming Dynasty. Furthermore, unlike cloud patterns, water ripple patterns have been extensively used in 'The Confucian Temple.' Particularly, Zhang *et al.* (Zhang et al., 2024) are of the view that water ripple has been used in courtyards where significant stone carving has been carried out. The authors believe that the water ripple patterns could also be found in the fountain and walkways, which have been introduced in the architecture with the aim to stress the moral purity and flow of wisdom value of Confucianism. This in turn dictates that water ripple has been used in the temple with the aim to stress the symbolic values, rather than artistic or aesthetic pleasing goals.

#### 4.3 The Summer Palace

The Summer Palace of Beijing was constructed during the Qing Dynasty, and it is considered not just a masterpiece of architectural work but also denotes the imperial powers of the rulers that constructed the palace. The

observation of the architectural work could reveal that cloud patterns have been significantly used in the Summer Palace, particularly in its long corridor and Tower of Buddhist Incense. Imperial glory and brilliance of the Qing Dynasty are evident from the use of different colours, while the intricate clouds that have been used in the architectural work denote spiritual aspirations related to Buddhism that was largely practiced in the period. Lei, Chunliu and Yahya (Lei et al., 2024) have thoroughly analysed the cloud patterns used in the Summer Palace, and the authors found that unlike cloud patterns found in other historical sites, the cloud patterns are more dynamic and multi-hued. Ran *et al.* (Ran et al., 2023) have, however, stated that the use of dynamic patterns reflects the upgradation of the cloud patterns that were used in the Ming Dynasty, as the Qing Dynasty brought innovation to the architectural work carried out during the Ming Dynasty. However, contrary to this, Chen & Zhang Weidner, (Weidner, 2001) believes that dynamic patterns used in the Qing Dynasty emphasise the lavishness and diversity that the Qing Dynasty experienced due to development in the field of agriculture. Similarly, the water ripple patterns could also be witnessed in the Summer Palace. Particularly, the prominent bridges and garden in the Kunming Lake area contain significant ripple motifs. Although there is significant symbolic value for which water ripple has been introduced in the building architecture, Sun & Zhao (Sun & Liang, 2023) have pointed out that its primary function is aesthetic and beautification of the architecture. (Merlin, 2011) have, however, pointed out that water ripple patterns found in the zigzag bridges of 'The Summer Palace' have been used for symbolic purposes, whereas they symbolise harmony and fluidity, besides connection relations between human beings and nature.

#### 4.4 The Temple of Heaven

The second case study that will be analysed in this research is 'The Temple of Heaven,' located in Beijing that was constructed during the Qing Dynasty. The site was constructed with the aim to pray for a good harvest; thus, the core element of the architecture site is religious rituals. It has been observed that cloud patterns have been widely used in the Circular Mound Altar, largely emphasising the interrelations between heaven and earth. According to Yang and Chen Li, (Li, 2006), the blending of cloud patterns with the phoenix motif in the temple has been used for symbolic purposes, as it denotes imperial divinity and the prosperity that was witnessed during the period. In particular, Zhang, Wu and Jin Wang, (Wang, 2015) have noted that cloud patterns combined with phoenix during the Qing Dynasty denote the significance of agriculture and significant improvement and development that the country

experienced due to the application of the latest agricultural techniques. Furthermore, water ripple patterns have also been extensively observed in the walkway, whereas significant stone carving has been carried out. According to Lei, Zhang, (Zhang, 2012), the water ripple patterns have been introduced for symbolic purposes, rather than aesthetic or functional purposes, as it denotes abundance. During the Ming era, significant prosperity has been noted as compared to previous dynasties, and the emperor at that time used the architecture to symbolise the emperor's role in prosperity witnessed throughout the country. It has also been observed that unlike other historical sites that have been observed for this research, 'The Temple of Heaven' has more intricately designed water ripple patterns that not only showcase the technical advancement of the artisan work carried out in stone carving but also the spiritual sensitivity that has been observed while creating such motif work.

#### 4.5 Comparative Analysis of Ming and Qing Dynasties

From the analysis of the four case studies that have been presented earlier, a comparison of the architectural work in the Ming and Qing Dynasties and the use of different motifs could be carried out. The analysis in this regard could reveal that in the Ming Dynasty, cloud patterns have been more systematically used as they were primarily used to exhibit Confucian and Daoist simplicity. Contrary to this, the cloud patterns found in the Qing Dynasty are more dynamic in nature as they were introduced with the aim to stress the symbolic meanings. In particular, the Qing lavishness and wide-ranging influence the use of the cloud patterns during the Qing era. Furthermore, the analysis of water ripple patterns carried out during the Ming and Qing Dynasties is also different. In this regard, the analysis of the Ming Dynasty's water ripple patterns shows subtly integrated use of water ripple patterns. Rather primarily aimed at symbolic purposes, the use of water ripple during the era served more of the functional needs of the site that have been observed in the research. On the contrary, the sites that have been constructed in the Qing Dynasty reflect bold and decorative symbolic features. The water ripple patterns created during the era are not only more artistic and more carefully carved but also they exhibit more symbolic meanings, rather than functional purposes. Further analysis and comparison of the architectural work carried out during the Ming and Qing Dynasties could reveal that the symbolic emphasis has been different during the two dynasties. In this regard, during the Ming Dynasty, the core symbolic emphasis on the use of cloud patterns and water ripple patterns was philosophical in nature, as the motif work has been introduced to establish a connection with Confucianism, Daoism, and

Buddhism. Transcendence and order could be thus readily observed in the architectural work belonging to the Ming Dynasty. On the other hand, the cloud patterns and water ripple introduced during the Qing Dynasty symbolised the spiritual and political harmony that took place throughout the country. In particular, they have been symbolised to denote imperial powers and the prosperity that took place during the Qing Dynasty. Moreover, artistic techniques that have been used for the cloud patterns and water ripple patterns during the Ming and Qing Dynasties also differ. The observation of the Ming Dynasty buildings revealed that limited use of polychrome and intricate carving has been carried out during the period. This could be due to the fact that technological advancement has not taken place during the era. However, the analysis of cloud patterns and water ripple patterns found during the Qing Dynasty revealed that they are much more professional in nature, as advanced-level polychrome techniques have been used during the era. Furthermore, significantly high standard intricate layering and vibrant hues could be observed in the Qing Dynasty building, depicting the artisan craftsmanship technical soundness.

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary of Research

This research analysed the aesthetic, artistic values, cultural patterns, and symbolic meanings for which cloud and water ripple patterns have been used in the selected buildings constructed during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The study found that cloud motifs and water ripple patterns have been widely utilised in the architecture that prevailed during the Ming and Qing dynasties. However, rather than employing these patterns for aesthetic and artistic purposes, they have been largely used for the sake of cultural patterns and symbolic connotations. Although throughout the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the cloud and water ripple patterns have been used, however, as per the analysis conducted, there are some differences in the two dynasties. In the Ming Dynasty, cloud patterns were used for denoting Confucian and Daoist ideas, while water ripple patterns have been largely introduced for functional purposes. On the other hand, in the Qing Dynasty, not only significant advancements have been noticed, but also more dynamic colours and intricate designs were introduced during the Qing dynasty. In the Qing dynasty, significant emphasis was made on the spiritual and imperial symbolism that has been witnessed in the case of cloud patterns and water ripple patterns.

## 5.2 Implications of Research

This research has cultural implications, as cloud and water ripple patterns have been widely used for denoting cultural value, and to preserve the cultural heritage and integrity of the country, it is vital that such art should be protected and preserved. The research also offered artistic insight and philosophical value, as on the basis of the findings of the research, Chinese aesthetic and architectural philosophies have been better understood. In particular, the research highlights in what ways symbolism has been utilised for communicating socio-political and spiritual values. In addition, the research also offered professionals in the architecture field as they could draw the desired inspirations from the use of these motifs and could come up with other symbols for symbolic purposes in their architecture designs that go beyond aesthetic purposes. In particular, from the findings of the study, architecture professionals could learn the symbolic significance of respecting cultural heritage.

## 5.3 Limitations of Research

There are different limitations of the current study. This includes limited access to heritage sites that affected the observational study. Furthermore, historical documents and archives that have been analysed for this research have, however, witnessed documentation gaps as they are preserved effectively. This in turn could have affected the findings of the research. In addition, the research also has limitations because of the use of employing qualitative research methodology. While carrying out the analysis process, biases could have been witnessed that could have affected the findings of the research.

## 5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

For future research, it is recommended that special permissions should be obtained for the observations of architectural sites. In particular, such could help in observing restricted areas and could shed more thorough light on the use of cloud and water ripple patterns in architectural sites. Furthermore, for future research, it is recommended that extensive searches for archival research documents should be conducted that could help in more thorough analysis, leading to better research insight. In addition, for future research, it is recommended that instead of using qualitative research methodology alone, mixed research methodology should be used, as this could not only help in avoiding biases but also help in ensuring the desired research triangulations in the future research.

## References

- Cahill, J. (1978). *Parting at the Shore: Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty, 1368-1580*. Weatherhill.
- Cheng, Y., & Tan, M. (2018). The quantitative research of landscape color: A study of Ming Dynasty City Wall in Nanjing. *Color Research & Application*, 43(3), 436-448.
- Christian, A. (2021). Daoist Principles and Color Symbolism in Ming Dynasty Ceramic Painting.
- Ding, S. Y. (2020). Historical evolution of water pattern and its application in modern design. *Education, and Research*, 68-69.
- Hanmo, Z. (2021). Solidified Qi Clouds. *Ritual and Economy in East Asia*, 313.
- Hu, X. (2014). Landscape appreciation and local memory: on touring activities by the Ming literati in Nanjing and urban culture concerned. *Journal of Nanjing University Philosophy and Humanity and Social Science*, 76-90.
- Huai, K. (2019). Cultural Mapping of Animal Ornamentation in Eaves Tiles of the State of Qi. *Revista Científica de la Facultad de Ciencias Veterinarias*, 29(6), 1814-1821.
- Huang, X., Cheng, C., & Huang, Y. (2023). Identification Design of the Emblem Pattern on the Official Robes of the Central Plains Dynasty—Taking the Ming Dynasty. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*.
- Huo, P., Hou, M., Dong, Y., Li, A., Ji, Y., & Li, S. (2020). A method for 3D reconstruction of the ming and qing official-style roof using a decorative components template library. *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information*, 9(10), 570.
- Jaiqi, D., & Bo, L. (2018). Research on Decorative Patterns of Architectural Decorations of Shanshan Guild Hall in Ming and Qing Dynasty. *Journal of Art, Education, and Research*, 82-83.
- Jing, A. (2002). *The Water God's Temple of the Guangsheng Monastery: Cosmic Function of Art, Ritual and Theater* (Vol. 53). Brill.
- Lai, D. (2007). Designing a Ideal Chinese-style Modern Building: Liang Sicheng' s Architectural History Writing and Liao Song Style of Nanjing National Central Museum Design (设计一座理想的中国风格的现代建设——梁思成中国建筑史叙述与南京国立中央博物院辽宋风格设计再思). *Studies in Modern Chinese Architectural History*, 331-362.
- Lei, C., Chunliu, G., & Yahya, S. R. (2024). Formal Aesthetics of Dragon Patterns in Ming Dynasty Clothing. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*.
- Li, W.-y. (2012). Gardens and illusions from late Ming to early Qing. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 295-336.
- Li, Y. (2006). *An exploration of designed water in traditional and contemporary Chinese landscape architecture* University of Guelph].
- Li, Z., & Yang, Z. (2021). Research on the application of Chinese traditional pattern cloud pattern in landscape sketch. *E3S Web of Conferences*,
- Lin, H., Wang, J.-B., Zhang, X., Hu, F., Liu, J., & Hong, X.-C. (2024). Historical sensing: the spatial pattern of soundscape occurrences recorded in poems between the Tang and the Qing Dynasties amid urbanization. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11(1), 1-27.
- Liu, K., Zhou, S., & Zhu, C. (2022). Historical changes of Chinese costumes from the

- perspective of archaeology. *Heritage Science*, 10(1), 205.
- Mengjie, W., Jarit, M. H. M., & Yang, W. (2020). Exploring the Wave Motif in Pictorial Maps: From the Perspectives of Chinese Painting Theory and Water Culture.
- Merlin, M. (2011). The Nanjing courtesan Ma Shouzhen (1548–1604): gender, space and painting in the late Ming pleasure quarter. *Gender & History*, 23(3), 630-652.
- Michaelson, C., & Portal, J. (2006). *Chinese art in detail* (Vol. 3). Harvard University Press.
- Miller, T. (2020). *The Divine Nature of Power: Chinese Ritual Architecture at the Sacred Site of Jinci* (Vol. 62). BRILL.
- Ran, P., Jie, M. C., Keyuan, M. D., Yehao, B. L., & Xueliang, B. L. (2023). Research on Traditional Performing Places in Wuling Mountain Area of China. *Convergence of Contemporary Thought in Architecture, Urbanism, and Heritage Studies*, 237.
- Rawson, J. (2000). Cosmological systems as sources of art, ornament and design. *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, 72, 133-189.
- Shao, Q., Wen, X., & White, P. (2022). Design Thinking Under the Qing Dynasty. In *A Brief History of Chinese Design Thought* (pp. 225-272). Springer.
- Sullivan, M. (1954). Pictorial art and the attitude toward nature in ancient China. *The Art Bulletin*, 36(1), 1-19.
- Sun, L. (2022). An artistic architectural modernity: past and tradition in Liu Jipiao's decorative architectural design in the late-1920s China. *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering*, 21(5), 1677-1696.
- Sun, Y., & Liang, J. (2023). Artistic Integration in Ming and Qing Garden Design. *Studies in Chinese Art History*, 44-61.
- Wang, H., & Ke, Y. (2024). *Patterns in Mazu Culture: Symbolic Meaning and Expression in Contemporary Society* Mahasarakham University].
- Wang, R., & Wang, J. (2023). Comparing Wangchuan villa of Tang dynasty and humble Administrator's garden of Ming dynasty from the perspective poetry and painting atlas. 223-225.
- Wang, Y.-W., Pendlebury, J., & Nolf, C. (2023). The water heritage of China: the polders of Tai Lake Basin as continuing landscape. *Planning Perspectives*, 38(5), 949-974.
- Wang, Y. (2015). *A cultural history of classical Chinese gardens*. World Scientific.
- Weidner, M. (2001). Imperial Engagements with Buddhist Art and Architecture: Ming Variations on an Old Theme. *Cultural Intersections in Later Chinese Buddhism*, 117-144.
- Weidner, M. (2003). The Water God's Temple of the Guangsheng Monastery: Cosmic Function of Art, Ritual, and Theater. In: JSTOR.
- Williams, C. A. S. (1976). *Outlines of Chinese symbolism and art motives: an alphabetical compendium of antique legends and beliefs, as reflected in the manners and customs of the Chinese*. Courier Corporation.
- Xu, M., Wei, S., & Zhang, H. (2011). Artistic techniques of water management in four Chinese gardens and reflections on water management in modern gardens. 20-23.
- Xu, Y., & Puntien, P. (2024). Ming Dynasty Blue And White Motifs And Their Influence On Contemporary Painting And Visual Arts. *Mediterranean Archaeology & Archaeometry*, 24(2).
- Xue, L., & He, C. (2024). Study on the Decorative Art of Ancient Theatre Stage in East Coast of Zhejiang, China under the Analysis of Big Data. *Applied Mathematics and Nonlinear Sciences*.

- Yang, H. (2013). *Decorative plasterwork of Guangzhou during the dynasty Qing (1644-1911)* Univerza v Novi Gorici, Fakulteta za podiplomski študij].
- Yuan, H. (2024). *Unveiling an interactive and immersive Virtual Reality (VR) experience through digital construction of a historical landscape painting* [Iowa State University].
- Yuan, L., Xu, Z., & Xu, N. (2024). The Chinese city in mountain and water: shaping the urban landscape in Chengdu. *Landscape Research*, 49(2), 176-191.
- Zhang, L. (2012). Nature and landscape in the Chinese tradition. In *New perspectives on the research of Chinese culture* (pp. 1-15). Springer.
- Zhang, R., & Zhou, Y. (2021). Cultural Significance of Water Motifs in Qing Architecture. *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, 85-98.
- Zhang, W., Wang, Y., Fu, L., & Hu, Y. (2024). Scenery deconstruction: a new approach to understanding the historical characteristics of Nanjing cultural landscape. *Heritage Science*, 12(1), 62.
- Zou, H. (2012). The idea of labyrinth (Migong) in Chinese building tradition. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 46(4), 80-95.