

# Conveying Spirit Through Form: An Exploration on the Shape Symbols of Foshan Awakening Lion Head

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doi:10.56397/AS.2024.02.08

## Abstract

This study begins by focusing on the shape elements of the Foshan lion head, aiming to understand the unique design symbols and cultural significance of the vibrantly colored Foshan Awakening Lion. The research delves into the distinct features of the Foshan lion head, examining its role as a confluence of historical heritage, regional characteristics, and folk beliefs. Through an analysis of various visual elements of the lion head, such as size, shape, and decorative patterns, the study unveils the embedded cultural narratives and historical significances. Additionally, this research discusses the evolution of these elements within the Foshan lion dance culture, highlighting their importance in the preservation and development of Southern Chinese lion dance traditions.

The findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of the artistic value and cultural implications of the Foshan lion head. This work is of significant importance for the preservation of cultural heritage in the Foshan region and provides theoretical support for the research and inheritance of Southern Chinese lion dance culture. By offering a comprehensive cultural interpretation of the Foshan lion head's stylistic features, this study enhances the reader's understanding of its role and significance in the traditional culture of the Foshan area, offering valuable insights and directions for future research and practices in related cultural fields.

**Keywords:** Foshan Awakening Lion Head, shape element, shape symbol

## 1. Introduction

Foshan Awakening Lion, representing the Southern Lion, has garnered global attention for its unique artistic form and profound cultural depth. Since 2006, Guangdong's lion dance, particularly the Foshan variant, has become an integral part of China's intangible cultural heritage. The Foshan lion head, an indispensable prop in the Foshan Awakening Lion dance, not only carries the rich historical and cultural heritage of the Foshan area but was also officially recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2008. The design, color, patterns, and decorations of the Foshan lion head perfectly blend the local folklore and regional characteristics of the Foshan area, making it a unique visual art form.

In China, there are Northern Lions in the north and Southern Lions in the south. Due to regional differences in customs and beliefs, there are significant differences in the appearance and performance styles of the Northern and Southern Lions (Gong, B. H., 1999; Zeng, Y. F., 2011). Generally, Southern Chinese lion dances focus more on decoration and exhibit more agile performance skills. The Northern Lions emphasize dance steps and performance content. For instance, the Xushui lion dance from Hebei Baoding features light and playful steps with realistically shaped props. In contrast, typical representatives of the Southern Lions in Guangdong, like the Foshan Awakening Lion, excel in dance performances, emphasizing drama and stories, with abstract and brightly colored props. In appearance, the Northern Lion resembles a real animal, while the Southern Lion is more exaggerated and imposing, resembling a lion in spirit.

This paper aims to deeply explore the stylistic symbols of the Foshan lion head, discussing its unique form and cultural symbolism. We will analyze the design elements of the Foshan lion head, including the structure and details of its shape proportions, cheeks, nose, mouth, ears, eyes, and horns, and how these elements reflect the history and cultural traditions of the Foshan region. Through an in-depth study of the various stylistic features of the Foshan lion head, this paper intends to reveal the cultural meanings and symbolic significances behind them, further elucidating how these design elements visually convey the essence of the Foshan Awakening Lion.

## 2. Literature Review

In the study of Chinese lion dance culture, some scholars believe that the core concept of the Awakening Lion lies in its performance, namely dance steps and skills. However, others argue that the development of lion dance culture requires efforts in multiple directions.

There is a close relationship between the Awakening Lion mask and cultural export. As background information indicates, the production methods for lion heads in the Guangdong region include “tying, pasting, painting, and embellishing”, based on these four production steps, the visual elements of lion head masks can be categorized into shape, color, pattern, and decoration. Research in the visual domain of the Awakening Lion is relatively underdeveloped, primarily due to the lack of materials in “lion head making”, a folk craft, and the difficulties in conducting field research.

Although lion head masks hold an important position in art and cultural studies, in-depth research on their visual symbols is relatively sparse. Most studies on the visual symbols of lion dance masks remain confined to basic descriptions of their shape or color. Scholars’ introductions to the shape of the Awakening Lion head are rather general. Wu, N., & Wang, X. C. (2021) mentioned that the Awakening Lion is derived from the Northern Lion but has transitioned from a concrete to a contemplative image style, with exaggerated and dramatized features... the Awakening Lion has a full forehead, protruding eyes and mouth, a single horn on top of the head, and an imposing figure. However, these descriptions stay at an abstract level, lacking detailed explanations of the design details, origins, or implications of the shapes. Similar literature is not uncommon. Zhou, J. (2014) analyzed the impression factors of Foshan Awakening Lion’s shape, noting the “exaggerated features, high forehead, huge eyes, and apricot-shaped nose”, along with detailed descriptions of the shape, including “the philtrum of the lions mouth turning upwards, and its lower jaw being a thin piece that can move up and down”. These descriptions, when combined with images in the text, present a clear picture of the lion head mask’s shape, yet the symbols represented by the shape remain unexplained.

Li, F. (2017) analyzed the origin of the Lingnan Awakening Lion’s horn, stating that the shape of the Awakening Lion is a fusion of the lion and unicorn features, with the single-horned lion’s shape originating from a legend: In the early Ming Dynasty, a terrifying unicorn appeared in Foshan. People wanted to “fight beast with beast”, so they made a lion with a single horn out of bamboo and paper, scared the monster away with drums and firecrackers, and since then, the single-horned lion has been considered an auspicious mascot. However, the article does not specify the source of the legend, nor does it provide further analysis of the horn’s shape. There are various shapes of horns on Foshan lion head masks. Yu, W. S. (2015) mentioned that the initial shape of the horns on the Foshan lion head was pointed, but as the design and performance of the lion head evolved, craftsmen created various shapes of horns, such as “spiky horns”, “fist horns”, “eagle horns”, “turtle horns”, and “elephant trunk horns (long curved horns)”. Descriptions like these, without visual illustrations, fail to convey to readers the distinctive features of the shapes, nor do they present the specific appearance, application scenarios, or design philosophy of these shapes.

It is evident that research related to the shape of the Foshan lion head still leaves much to be explored.

## 3. Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative research methods to delve deeply into and understand the design and cultural significance of the Foshan lion head masks. Qualitative research allows for detailed and in-depth analysis of various aspects of the lion head masks, thereby gaining a richer and deeper understanding of their artistic form and cultural background. The research process encompasses multiple steps from data collection to analysis, each aimed at gradually deconstructing the complexity and diversity of the lion head masks. This process includes extensive literature reviews, expert interviews, field observations, and case studies, ensuring a comprehensive capture of the essence of Foshan lion head masks from multiple perspectives.

Figure 1 presents the methodological framework adopted in this study. The research initially identifies the focal point as the design features of the Foshan lion heads, followed by the data collection phase, primarily conducted through diversified means such as literature reviews, expert interviews, and on-site investigations. Specifically, the core objective of this research is to identify the specific shape elements present in the Foshan Awakening Lion masks. To this end, an initial task is to conduct an in-depth analysis of related literature to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic’s background, which is crucial for subsequent data collection.

Next, this study gathers first-hand information through interviews with professionals involved in the Foshan Awakening Lion and its mask-making process. These interviews, arranged through official websites and museums, are planned with 8 relevant practitioners in the Foshan area. The results of these interviews, after selection and validity verification, will be incorporated into the research analysis. All interviews are conducted offline, face-to-face, with some interviewees' information anonymized and labeled with letters A-H.

Finally, the study will conduct a comparative analysis of the data collected from literature reviews, interviews, and field observations, combined with image analysis, to clarify the design elements of the Foshan lion heads and their represented cultural meanings and symbolic significances. This comprehensive methodological approach aims to provide a holistic and in-depth perspective on the artistic and cultural characteristics of the Foshan lion heads.

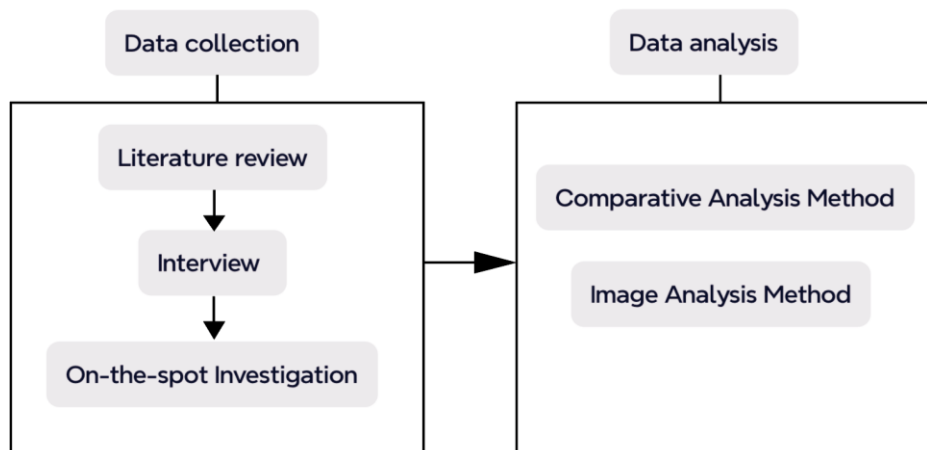


Figure 1. Research Methodology Framework (by Zhan Sudan, 2023)

## 4. Finding

### 4.1 The Shape Elements of Foshan Lion Heads

The author utilized the Nvivo analysis tool to conduct an in-depth data organization of various stylistic features of the Foshan region's Awakening Lion heads, compiling them into a comprehensive information table (Table 1). This table effectively presents the various design details of the Foshan lion heads, achieving a comprehensive understanding of their specific stylistic features.

Table 1. Keyword List of Foshan Lion Head Shape Elements

Shape					
Characteristics	Cheek	Double cheeks	Traditional type		
			Unique		
		decorated by fish in some design	Develop direction		
	Nose	Big nose, big nostrils, with nasal hair, shaped like garlic			
	Mouth	Large opening, arched upper lips, three-dimensional teeth			
	Ears	Zhang Fei lion	Broken ears	Militant	
	Eyes	Guang gong lion	Silkworm brows, phoenix eyes	Unique	
				Dignified	
	Horn	Dragon Horn	King	Power, treasure	
		Huge legendary turtle Horn	Ancient divine beast	Success	
		Fist Horn	Fist sounds like “quan”	Power	
		Bamboo Shoot Horn	Stainless steel, Sharp	Militant	

		Long Curved Horn	Huang Zhong lion	Honest and tolerant
		Eagle Horn	General	Bold and powerful
Size	Dimensions	There are different sizes	Hand made, each lion head has subtle differences	
	Proportion	Square and upright	Almost the same length, width, and height	
	Attributes	Job position		
		Generation	The younger generation	
			The older generation	
		Style characteristics		
		Understanding of lion head characters		
	Relationship	Belief	Handicrafter	Customer Demand
		Preference	Buyers	Customer Demand

As indicated in the table above, the shape composition of the Foshan lion head masks demonstrates the complexity of their visual elements. The design features listed in the table are a synthesis of information gathered from literature research, interview data, and field observations. These design elements form part of the preliminary information collection for the analysis phase, and the following sections will analyze each specific description based on this table.

#### 4.2 Overview and Analysis Framework of Shape Symbols in Foshan Lion Head

The Foshan Lion Head draws on the shape characteristics of Guangdong stone carved lions (Zhou, J., 2014). From the picture of the stone lion (Figure 2), it can be found that its shape differs significantly from real lions, but it is full of momentum and has an interesting style. The erect ears, prominent forehead, fierce eyes, large nose, and upturned mouth all share visual characteristics with the Foshan Lion Head. The colour and decorations of the Foshan Lion Head are closely related to the facial colours, costumes, and headdresses of classic characters in Cantonese opera. It can be seen that all the visual elements of the Foshan Lion Head are influenced by Lingnan culture, thus forming a classic representation of southern lion head art.



Figure 2. Foshan Stone Carved Lion (Foshan Ancestral Temple, 2023)

Given the problem-oriented approach of this study, combined with field research and literature research data, it is essential to present and individually analyse each visual element of the Foshan Lion Head. The information collected from interviews and field investigations is processed using encoding and word frequency analysis to extract key content, but textual descriptions alone are not sufficient to give readers a clear understanding of the lion head's appearance and cultural connotations. Using image analysis and theoretical analysis to supplement this information, presenting and interpreting it with a combination of images and text, can make the research content more comprehensive and clearer.

As shown above, the sub-items of “shape” are “characteristics” and “size”. The visual elements that make the characteristics of the Foshan Lion Head distinctive are the cheek, nose, mouth, ears, eyes, and horn. Some records can be found in the literature about the description of the facial features and horns of the Foshan Lion

Head. For instance, Han, R. & Cheng, X. (2014) in their study titled “Comparative Visual Design Research of Lion Dance Masks from the North and South — Focusing on Foshan and Pizhou Lion Dance Masks” included a description of the Foshan lion mask’s design: “A red-faced cultural lion with a high forehead, large mouth, white eyebrows, white beard, and an imposing appearance, featuring vibrant colours”. While these descriptions are accurate, they are abstract. Another example, there is no specific analysis or explanation about how high the forehead is or how large the mouth is. Similarly, Zhou, J. (2014) described the mouth and tongue of the Foshan Lion Head as “a large mouth with a smile, with visible teeth and a quivering tongue”. Such descriptions, while accurate, remain somewhat ambiguous. Therefore, systematic explanations of each visual element through detailed image and data analysis are both essential and necessary.

#### 4.3 Foshan Lion Head’s Shape Elements Details and Symbols

##### 4.3.1 Size and Proportions

The standard sizes of Foshan Lion Heads are classified into five categories: special-grade, first-grade, export, second-grade (domestic), and third-grade lions. Another sizing method is based on the width of the lion’s mouth, with sizes including 41.7 cm, 40 cm, 36.7 cm, and 33 cm; the sizes of “young lions” designed for children include 30 cm, 26.7 cm, 23.3 cm, 20 cm, and 16.7 cm (Lin, M.T., 1993).

The production standards of the Foshan Lion Head provide data regarding the width of the lion’s mouth for this study, but information on the proportions of length, width, and height are still missing. According to field research, the manufacturing sizes of each Lion Head varies depending on the factory or craftsman, therefore, the proportions of length, width, and height can better illustrate the visual characteristics of the lion mask. Zeng, Y.F. (2011) described the contour of the Lion Head as “balanced and full”. Based on this description, the researcher conducted a proportional analysis of the Lion Head samples collected during the field investigation in Foshan. Figures 3 and 4, were taken from the De Sheng Musical Instrument Factory, the Huang Feihong Cultural Museum, and the intangible cultural heritage exhibition site in Foshan respectively, with each depicting a Lion Head enclosed in a red square frame with a 1:1 aspect ratio. This shows that the Lion Head’s contours follow a roughly 1:1:1 ratio, giving the Lion Head a visually cuboid form that matches the descriptions found in literature.



Figure 3. Foshan Lion Head Proportion Tri-View (Foshan De Sheng Musical Instrument Factory/Huang Feihong Cultural Museum, 2023)





Figure 4. Foshan Lion Head Front and Side Proportion Diagram (The Intangible Cultural Heritage Creation Exhibition Site, 2023)

The square and proportionate design exudes an aura of dominance and expansion in visual representation. Zhu, W., et al. (2009) noted that during the Qianlong era of the Qing Dynasty, Foshan's unique economic and military status, combined with the local popular martial spirit, drew significant attention from anti-Qing patriots. Subsequently, the "picking the greens" activity in the lion dance performance symbolized resistance against the Qing. Within the lion dance performance, the hardships of the Han people's resistance against the Qing are depicted, encompassing a range of emotions from joy to anger, and from surprise to intensity. Thus, in the design of the lion's head, there is an absence of excessively smooth lines; instead, square proportions and robust lines are employed to portray its dominant characteristics.

#### 4.3.2 Lion's Cheeks

The "double cheeks" is a significant characteristic of the Foshan Lion Head.

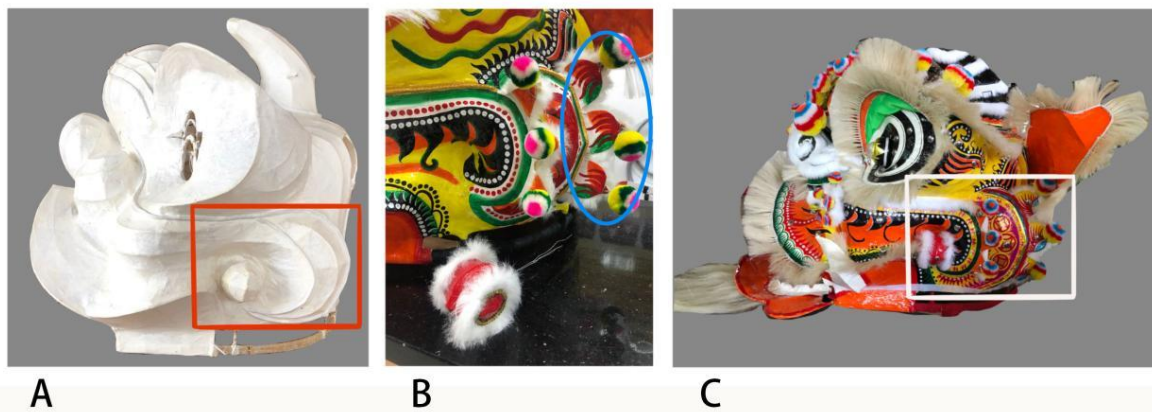


Figure 5. Display of Foshan Lion Head's Double Cheeks (Foshan De Sheng, 2023)

In Figure 5, part A marked with a red frame shows the white embryo diagram of the Foshan Lion Head's double cheeks, where readers can clearly see the structure of the cheeks. The double-layered cheek structure encloses a round-headed hammer (locally referred to by craftsmen as "Guen", which will be further elaborated in the section on decoration) giving the lion a smiling appearance when viewed from the side. The blue circled area in figure B shows spikes located on the outer side of the cheeks. This structure resembles the adornments found on helmets worn by Ming Dynasty generals, as shown in figure 6. The inclusion of "wings" in the cheek design gives the lion head the majestic air of a warrior. In the term "lion dance", the pronunciation of "dance" is the same as "martial" in Chinese, both being "wu". Xia, C. (2022) posits that "dance" and "martial" had the same origin in ancient times. In Foshan, lion dance performers are required to learn martial arts before learning lion dance, making the performance not only entertaining but also a promotion of Chinese martial arts culture. The

white box in figure C shows the position of the double cheeks on the lion head, highlighting how the complex and colourful cheeks in the lion dance mask are a crucial part for craftspeople to show their unique creativity.

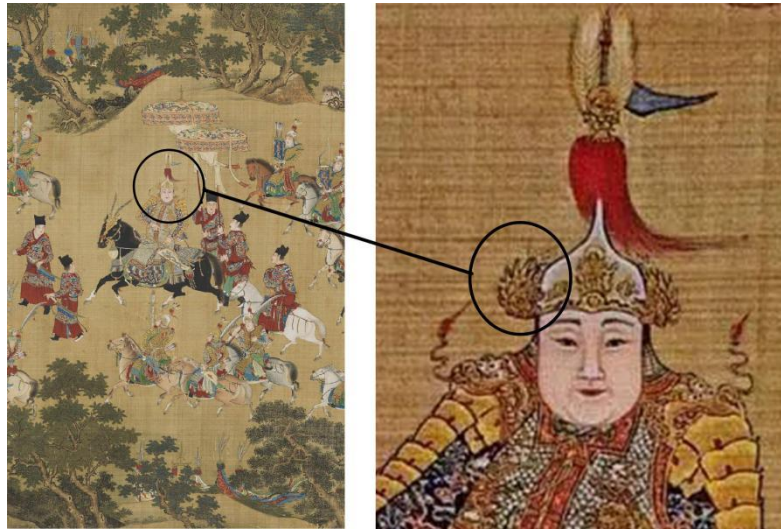


Figure 6. Ming Dynasty “Emerging for Duty” Anonymous (Baidu Scholar, 2023)

The term “martial” gives the lion head its “spirit”. This interpretation aligns with Peirce’s triadic concept of “symbol”. He defined a “symbol” as a mark that acquires meaning according to convention or habit. The index of “martial” is the specific activity of martial arts. In the lion dance, the term “wu” (dance) has a close relationship with the dance in the lion dance, which is the conventionally accepted understanding of “lion dance” by the Foshan public. Almost every visual element of the lion head mask is deeply connected with the “symbol”. The cultural background and connotation contained in its symbols profoundly reflect the Chinese culture embodied by the lion head.

#### 4.3.3 Lion’s Nose

The lion’s nose is located in the centre of the frontal view of the lion head and resembles the shape of a garlic bulb, hence it is also known as the “garlic bulb nose” by craftsmen. Figure 7 A marked with the red box shows the appearance of the garlic bulb nose on the base model of the lion head mask, B shows its side profile, and C shows how it appears after colouring. The display of the base model allows audiences to better appreciate the distinctive features of the lion’s nose. After decoration, the unique shape of the lion’s nose is often overlooked, hence the rounded and large lion’s nose must occupy a significant position in the lion head.

Although Foshan Lion Heads are known for their abstract resemblance, the craftsmen show unique ingenuity in sculpting some details. The green circle in the figure above marks the nostril hairs. This design typically only appears in the “Zhang Fei” character, reflecting his angry and rugged temperament.

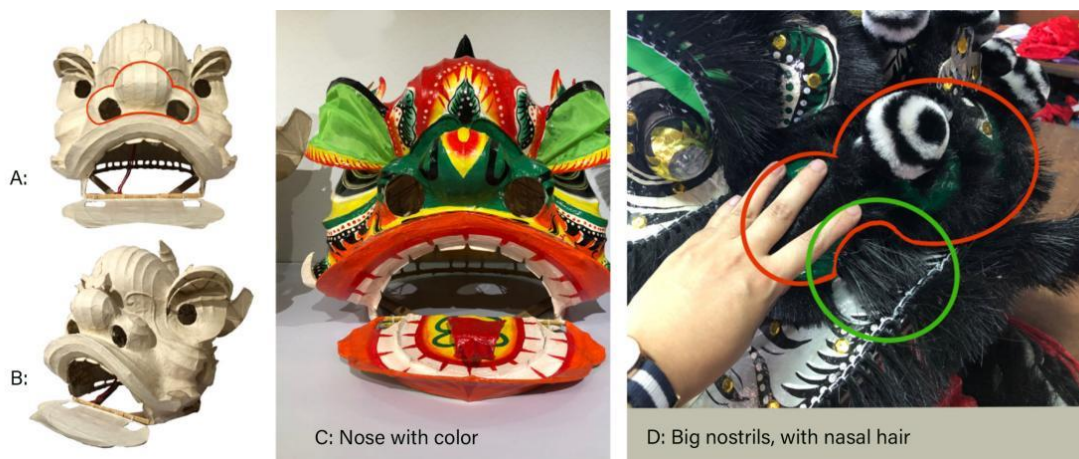


Figure 7. Demonstration of Foshan Lion Head Nose (The Intangible Cultural Heritage Creation Exhibition Site/Foshan De Sheng, 2023)

#### 4.3.4 Lion's Mouth

During a lion dance performance, “picking the greens” is the climax of the whole performance. When the lion's mouth devours the lettuce, it draws thunderous applause from the audience. Zeng, Y.F. (2011) said that “picking the greens” was a secret code in the Qing Dynasty. A group of aspiring individuals harboured the grand plan of “overthrowing the Qing and restoring the Ming”. In the politically sensitive climate of the time, lion dance performances subtly hinted at resistance against the Qing Dynasty through the act of “picking the greens”. This is because in Chinese, the phrase “picking the greens” shares phonetic similarities with “anti-Qing”, making it a representation of defiance against the Qing government. Over time, the significance of “picking the greens” has shifted. In Cantonese, the term for lettuce, which is the “green” being picked, is phonetically similar to “prosperity”. Thus, the act of consuming lettuce in the dance became a symbol of prosperity and good fortune.



Figure 8. Demonstration of Foshan Lion Head Mouth (Foshan De Sheng, 2023)

Figure 8 shows the structure of the Guangdong Awakening Lion head. The large mouth that is upturned into a blunt angle is a signature design of the Foshan Lion Head. The inside of the upper lip is made with clearly defined lion teeth. Real lions do not have flat teeth but sharp teeth. However, the design of sharp teeth does not align with the symbol of the mascot, so they can only make flat teeth. But some craftsmen will add a small sharp tooth or a curved long sharp tooth on both sides of the mouth to display the lion head's vigour. The design of the lion's mouth also has practical significance in lion dance performances. Lion dancers can interact with the audience through the lion's mouth to liven up the atmosphere.

#### 4.3.5 Lion's Ears

The two ears of the Foshan Lion Head are installed on either side of the lion's head, presenting a firm and spirited appearance. The text records about lion ears are generally summarized as “wind-catching ears” and similar expressions. However, in interviews, traditional craftsmen have mentioned that the ears of the Zhang Fei lion head, a character from Foshan's lion head tradition, are occasionally made into “broken ears”. It is said that Zhang Fei's character in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is wild and combative, so some masters would artistically craft based on their understanding of the character; the missing piece in Zhang Fei lion's ear is a wound left from fighting. This interpretation is not documented in the literature, and I did not see any samples on the scene of the interview. Still, seven out of eleven valid interview records mention this detail. Figure 9A shows the picture of Zhang Fei's lion ears, but no “damaged ear” design is seen. Interviewee C stated that such designs only appear on custom-made lion heads and are not frequently made. As lion dances are considered auspicious and festive in the public's mind, designs implying “fighting” or “provocation” do not often appear in regular lion dance performances. The bravery implied by the “broken ear” is not what the general public expects, that is a personalized design.

Figure 9C shows the design details on the back of Liu Bei's lion ear. This detail echoes the small “wing” in the cheek. During the lion dance performance, the audience can find interesting aspects of the lion head design from various angles.





Figure 9. Display of Foshan Lion Head Ears (Foshan De Sheng, 2023)

#### 4.3.6 Lion's Eyes

The eyes of the Foshan Lion Head are as large as bronze bells and can move freely when blinking, adding interest to the performance. The eye outline of the Awakening Lion is surrounded by a ring of thick mane, with the eyelid connected to the eye socket by fabric, and the large eyeball is located in the centre of the eye socket. There are various materials for making eyeballs: wooden eyeballs are rustic and beautiful, but they are heavy and complex to make; the Guan Gong lion in Figure 9A uses plastic. The eyeballs made of plastic have a variety of colour options, lightweight materials, and can even be connected to a lighting device to make it glow.

The styling of the old Guan Gong in the traditional Foshan Lion Head is unique. Apart from using three-dimensional lines to represent wrinkles on the forehead, the biggest difference from other lion head shapes lies in its eyes. Figure 10B shows the white mould of the old Guan Gong lion head, with the master holding the frame of its eyebrow shape, and C shows the final effect of this eyebrow structure. Luo, G.Z. (1980) wrote in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*: “Xuan De (Liu Bei) was greatly angered, his sleeping silkworm eyebrows raised, his ringed phoenix eyes wide open... Guan Yu (Guan Gong) held the Green Dragon Saber and rode the Red Hare horse”. The craftsmen say that the design inspiration for the old Guan Gong model comes from “sleeping silkworm eyebrows and phoenix eyes”. Guan Gong is an imposing figure. The sleeping silkworm eyebrows and phoenix eyes are prominent design features, and the imposing manner is the master's control of the lines and abstract artistic perception of the shape. In the interview data, many masters stated that the skills to make lions come from the teachings passed down from their predecessors. They stated that due to the lack of records and materials, many traditional detail designs have gradually been lost.



Figure 10. Display of Guan Gong Lion Eyes in Foshan (Foshan De Sheng, 2023)

There is also a special small decoration above the lion's eyes, which the masters call the “tower incense” (Figure 10D). The design of the tower incense is similar to the large tower incense used in Chinese rituals, placed above both lion eyes. Interviewee B stated that burning incense to worship Buddha is part of Chinese ritual culture, symbolizing “safety”, and is also a sign of auspiciousness.

#### 4.3.7 Lion Horns

Horns, located at the top of the lion head mask. In the design of Foshan Lion Heads, the design styles of lion horns are varied and have good implications. Artisans in Foshan who are engaged in making lion heads create various shapes on the horns of the lion. The 6 types of horn shapes shown in Figure 11 are all full of creativity and vivid.

Foshan is a famous city for arts and crafts in China. Among them, paper puppet craft is a unique skill of Foshan artisans. The Foshan paper puppet craft rose in the late Qing Dynasty. It can be made into various lifelike products with daily cheap raw materials or waste materials. The most well-known of this craft is the Foshan Autumn Colour crafts, whose lifelike degree is astonishing (Guo, Y. B., 2019). Xie, X. J., & Zhao, F. (2022) pointed out the connection between Foshan Autumn Colour paper puppet craft and Foshan Lion Head. They said: The exquisite paper puppet craft makes lion head-made souvenirs and other derivative products of lion dance culture favoured by overseas markets. This makes it easy to understand why the modelling of Foshan Lion Heads is ingeniously done.

Figure 11 shows the shape of the lion horns. A is the dragon horn, which is generally used in Liu Bei lion. Yan, D. C. (2006) said that the dragon has a variety of symbolic meanings in traditional Chinese culture. The most widely known is the symbol of “king power, imperial power”, the ancient Chinese kings called themselves “real dragon sons of heaven”; in folk beliefs, the dragon is considered a god with great power, who can summon wind and rain, and symbolizes auspiciousness. Therefore, the dragon-shaped horn in Liu Bei’s lion symbolizes auspiciousness and royal power, and this meaning coincides with the words of the inheritors. The dragon shape on the horn shown in the picture, with bright eyes, open mouth, colourful and momentum like a rainbow. The dragon horn shape adds details to the lion head of the Awakening Lion and gives it a rich cultural connotation.

B shows another type of horn design on Liu Bei’s lion head, called the Ao fish horn. Both Ao fish and dragons are animals in ancient Chinese mythology. The description of the Ao fish in native Chinese ancient books is “body like a fish, head as a dragon”, usually the central part of the stone steps of the ancient palace hall is carved with dragons and giant Ao fish. During the Tang and Song dynasties, the top scorer stood on the head of the Ao fish in the stone steps when he was awarded, hence the saying “monopoly of the Ao head” (Li, Y. N., 2023). Therefore, the Ao fish-shaped horn is given the same “imperial power” meaning as the dragon, and also contains the auspicious meaning of “topping the list in the college entrance examination”.

The bamboo shoot horn on the top of Zhang Fei’s lion head is the most classic horn shape of the lion head mask. C shows the conventional bamboo shoot horn, the horn tip looks sharp and has momentum, it is neat and decisive, implying “decisive and resolute”. Interviewee B said that in order to shape the image of Zhang Fei’s bravery and combativeness, some artisans would use steel materials to wrap the bamboo shoot horn, making it sturdier and more durable, and giving it a “powerful and bold” feeling.



Figure 11. Horns of Foshan Lion Head (Huang Feihong Cultural Museum, 2023)

The picture D shows the eagle horn on Zhao Yun's lion head. In the culture of the Chinese nation, the eagle is regarded as a divine bird. In ancient military, the eagle symbolizes the war god and is a representative of "bravery". "Liezi·Emperor" records: the emperor defeated Chiyou, made the "Tong drum song" to celebrate, one of which "Eagle and Eagle Fight" is the earliest in China to use the eagle as a symbol of hero victory. Since then, the "eagle" has become a symbol of bravery and good warfare. Zhao Yun, also known as Zhao Zilong, is portrayed as a perfect general in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. He is brave and decisive, righteous, and ambitious (Yang, J. G., 2021). This can explain why the inheritors incorporated the eagle's shaping elements into the design of Zhao Yun's lion head mask. The flying eagle-shaped horn gives Zhao Yun's lion the meaning of "brave and good at warfare, the general who always wins", thereby distinguishing it from the other several lion head characters who are also generals.

The horn of the Guan Gong lion is like a "fist", as shown in picture E, which looks like around ball structure is added to the top of the bamboo shoot horn. "Fist" and "power" are pronounced the same "quan" in Chinese, the inheritor said the "fist horn" was a design detail based on the characteristics of Guan Gong's character. Guan Yu, also known as Guan Gong, is a famous historical hero. To this day, his loyalty and hero stories are still sung by the world. Guan Gong is not only regarded as a cultural symbol symbolizing "protecting the country and the people" in China, but also as a deity for worship (Zheng, X. X., 2016). Li, X. F., & Deng, X. H. (2015) believe that the "loyalty, righteousness, benevolence, courage, etiquette, wisdom, and faith" of Guan Gong culture embody the traditional virtues of the Chinese nation and are the core values of folk ideology. Guan Gong is a general, but in the design of the Awakening Lion's lion head, it shows his "benevolence" feature, so its horn does not use the design of sharp bamboo shoot horn, but uses the round ball-shaped "fist horn" for modelling decoration.

The design of the long-curved horn (elephant nose horn) is not common, but it is very suitable for Huang Zhong's lion head. Huang Zhong is an old general among the Five Tiger Generals in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. He, as an elder, is loyal and good at fighting, so Huang Zhong has become a symbol of "old and strong". The horn in picture F is a pointed horn, but it is long and bends downward, showing the elder's majesty, humility, and stability.

## 5. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the Shape Elements and cultural symbols of Foshan's Awakening Lion heads, supplementing research related to Foshan Awakening Lion with information on its design elements and symbols. The findings indicate that the design of the Foshan lion heads is not merely an artistic creation but a complex integration of historical heritage, local characteristics, and folk beliefs.

Additionally, this research explores the expression and evolution of the Foshan lion heads within the lion dance culture, emphasizing their crucial role in the preservation and development of Southern Chinese lion dance culture. The study highlights that the Foshan Awakening Lion heads, as cultural symbols, not only reflect the characteristics of local culture but are also a significant part of China's intangible cultural heritage.

In summary, this research offers a profound cultural interpretation of the Foshan Awakening Lion heads, enhancing the understanding of their artistic value and cultural significance. The "shape" in the Foshan lion heads conveys a variety of forms, while the "spirit" symbolizes Foshan's interpretation of the traditional virtues of the Chinese nation. Through this study, we can better understand and evaluate the role and significance of the Foshan Awakening Lion heads in Chinese traditional culture, providing valuable insights and directions for future research and practices in related cultural fields.

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