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Restoring Faith and Form: Challenges and Strategies in the Preservation of Lord Guan Temples in Southern Shanxi

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Abstract

Guan Yu (d. AD 220), better known by his posthumous title as Guan Gong or Lord Guan, was a prominent military general in the late Han dynasty (AD 206–220). For centuries, Lord Guan has been widely worshipped as both a god of war and a god of wealth throughout China. His worship is particularly prevalent in southern Shanxi, which is celebrated as his birthplace. This region features a notable array of temples dating from the late imperial period, many of which are specifically dedicated to his cult. As tangible heritage, Lord Guan temples represent a significant facet of Chinese architectural and religious history. Today, they continue to serve as religious spaces, where pilgrims and devotees come together to honour the deity through ritual practices and theatrical performances. These activities not only reinforce the community's religious beliefs but also help to perpetuate the cultural and historical traditions associated with Lord Guan's worship. Based on fieldwork conducted between 2023 and 2025, the study scrutinises the restoration, preservation and conservation challenges faced by these sacred spaces and structures, emphasising the ongoing tension and collaboration between grassroots religious practices and state-led restoration initiatives. Through this examination, the paper sheds light on the multifaceted nature of tangible and intangible heritage conservation and its implications for Lord Guan's cult in contemporary society.

Keywords: Lord Guan; temple theatre; cultural heritage; preservation and conservation

1. Introduction

In 2024, the release of the action role-playing game *Black Myth: Wukong* unexpectedly drew national and international attention to Shanxi Province, a region not typically regarded as a major tourist destination in China. Of the game's thirty-six major filming locations, twenty-seven are situated in Shanxi ([China National Radio 2024](#)), propelling the province's extraordinary cultural heritage into the public eye. The old saying—'For China's underground relics, look to Shaanxi; for its above-ground heritage, look to Shanxi'—is hardly an exaggeration: nearly eighty per cent of China's surviving historic architecture stands in Shanxi, where traces of the past remain visible almost everywhere—one only needs to look up ([Fang and Zhu 2025](#)).

Within this rich architectural landscape, Lord Guan temples occupy a distinctive place. One such temple features prominently in *Black Myth: Wukong*, underscoring the enduring cultural visibility of these sites. As sacred spaces, Lord Guan temples function simultaneously as places of worship, where devotees offer sacrifices and pray for blessings, and as cultural institutions that sustain and reinforce the Lord Guan cult.



Academic Editor: Fátima Matos Silva

Received: 30 January 2026

Revised: 16 February 2026

Accepted: 18 February 2026

Published: 20 February 2026

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This paper argues that an interdependent relationship exists between *faith* and *form*: believers' devotion enhances the religious and social significance of the temples, while the physical structures themselves serve as material anchors that preserve and perpetuate the cult. Their preservation thus requires attention to not only tangible heritage—the temples and temple theatres—but also to intangible heritage, including ritual practice and theatrical performance.

This dynamic is embedded in China's broader religious, cultural and architectural landscape. Across the country, especially in rural areas, it is not uncommon to find multiple temples dedicated to local deities and nationally venerated gods within a single village. A case in point is Jiacun Village, Lucheng in southeastern Shanxi, which boasts seventeen temples and shrines, including one dedicated to Lord Guan (Zhao 2021). Indeed, Lord Guan occupies an exceptionally prominent position in the Chinese pantheon, a status reflected in the widespread presence of temples dedicated to him across the country. His cult was added to the National-level List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (*Guojiaji feiwuzhiwenhua yichan minglu* 國家級非物質文化遺產名錄) in 2008 (The State Council of the People's Republic of China 2008), and since then, many temples and related ritual traditions have been recognised as both tangible and intangible cultural heritage at national and local levels.

As tangible heritage, Lord Guan temples have long shaped the development and dissemination of his cult. Equally important are Lord Guan temple theatres, which occupy a crucial intersection between religious devotion and traditional Chinese opera (*xiqu*). As spaces for ritual and theatrical performances, these temple theatres play a crucial role in conveying Lord Guan's virtues and heroic deeds. Ritual and theatrical performances held during temple festivals and seasonal celebrations reaffirm community devotion while continually revitalising *xiqu* traditions (Zhao 2021; Tian and Zhao 2025). Temple theatres thus constitute an essential component of both Chinese temple and theatre history.

This study draws on extensive fieldwork conducted in southern Shanxi between 2023 and 2025. Through interviews, ethnographic observation and documentation of restoration sites, it examines both state-funded and grassroots efforts to conserve Lord Guan temples and temple theatres. These practices reveal intricate negotiations between professional conservation frameworks and vernacular modes of maintaining intangible heritage rooted in ritual, performance and community participation. They also highlight how professional conservation intersects with the daily practices that give these structures meaning.

Building on these observations, this paper explores how devotion, authenticity and sustainability may be balanced in contemporary conservation efforts. Lord Guan temples embody irreplaceable cultural value; without appropriate preservation, they risk gradual physical deterioration that threatens not only the buildings themselves but also the survival of the Lord Guan cult. The loss of these structures would entail more than architectural decline: it would signify the erosion of a living tradition that continues to shape local identities and sustain cultural continuity.

2. Literature Review

The origins of heritage conservation are often traced to nineteenth-century Europe, where Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879) and John Ruskin (1819–1900) articulated two fundamentals yet opposing perspectives (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, p. 4). Viollet-le-Duc (1875, p. 14) advocated for restoring architecture to an idealised original state—often one that may never have existed in practice—while Ruskin ([1840] 2001, pp. 252, 254) condemned restoration as 'the most total destruction which a building can suffer' and rejected any attempt to recreate the past as 'a lie from beginning to end'. These divergent positions have

shaped subsequent debates in conservation theory, inspiring generations of scholars to reflect on questions of authenticity, interventions and cultural and historical continuity.

In recent decades, scholarly research on heritage conservation has expanded significantly, yielding a diverse range of perspectives and approaches addressing both tangible and intangible heritage. Governments, NGOs and academic communities increasingly recognise that intangible cultural heritage—rituals, religions, craftsmanship, performance traditions and other embodied knowledge—is crucial to sustaining community livelihoods and cultural diversity in an era of globalisation (Stefano et al. 2012). This shift reflects broader debates about the dynamic, living nature of cultural heritage and the need to preserve not only physical structures but also the practices and beliefs that animate them.

In China, modern architectural conservation began with early-twentieth-century efforts led by Zhu Qiqian 朱啟鈐 (1872–1964), who founded Zhongguo yingzao xueshe 中國營造學社 (the Society for Research in Chinese Architecture) in 1930. He appointed Liang Sicheng 梁思成 (1901–1972) and Liu Dunzhen 劉敦楨 (1897–1978) as deputy directors. During the 1930s, Liang and his wife, Lin Huiyin 林徽因 (1904–1955), undertook extensive surveys across China, documenting more than 1000 architectural structures from the medieval and late imperial periods. Their work laid the foundation for both architectural historiography and systematic preservation practices in China.

Building on this foundation, Liang developed a theoretical framework that remains influential today. His principle of ‘restoring the old as it was’ (*xiujiu rujiu* 修舊如舊) emphasised maintaining original form and materials rather than replacing them with new fabric (Liang 1963, p. 6). This approach reflected an emphasis on authenticity and continuity that distinguishes much of Eastern Asian conservation philosophy. Liang applied this principle in major projects, including the Temple of Confucius in Qufu, the Wenyuan Pavilion in the Forbidden City, the Wanchuan Pavilion in Jingshan Park, the Liuhe Pagoda in Hangzhou, and the Tengwang Pavilion in Nanchang. A significant milestone came in his 1935 report, *Qufu Kongmiao zhi jianzhu jiqi xiuqi jihua* 曲阜孔廟之建築及其修葺計劃 (*The Architecture of the Confucius Temple in Qufu and Its Restoration Plan*), where he systematically proposed—arguably for the first time—the principle of ‘restoring old buildings to their original state’, marking a turning point in Chinese conservation history.

Subsequent scholarship has extended these concerns to temple–theatre complexes that embody both tangible and intangible heritage. Since the 1980s, the Research Institution of Xiqu Relics at Shanxi Normal University (SXNU) has played a leading role in documenting and preserving these structures, particularly in rural areas where Lord Guan temples and temple theatres remain central to local ritual life. Their research has yielded substantial insights into architectural design, historical evolution and performance traditions. Feng (2006), for example, examines five Lord Guan temple theatres dating from the Hongwu 洪武 (1368–1398) to the Kangxi 康熙 (1662–1722) eras, offering a detailed analysis of their spatial configuration and ritual–theatrical functions. Niu (2014) explores sacrificial drama at the Lord Guan Temple in Yangqu County, highlighting its social and cultural significance. Additional studies published in *Chinese Traditional Opera* (*Zhonghua xiqu* 中華戲曲)—including Li (2011), Wei (2011), Shao (2013), Xu (2014), Yan (2015) and Cheng and Cheng (2016)—as well as theses by Wan (2020), Dong (2019), Q. Yang (2016), etc., contribute regional case studies and fieldwork-based analyses that enrich our understanding of how these spaces mediate between devotion and performance.

Research on the architecture of Lord Guan temples and Lord Guan temple theatre stages also provides important context. Chai (2002) offers a detailed study of the Haizhou Lord Guan Temple, analysing its layout and restoration, although the temple’s state-funded restoration limits insights into local religious community participation. Zhang (2006) investigates the architectural features of Lord Guan temples in Shanxi, argu-

ing that these temples serve not only as sites for worshipping Lord Guan but also as venues for everyday social activities within local communities.

Temple theatres—primary venues for ritual and theatrical performance—are ubiquitous in southern Shanxi, the birthplace of Lord Guan. These structures have witnessed the historical development of both the Lord Guan cult and its associated xiqu performances, yet they have not received sustained scholarly attention. Existing studies tend to focus on either architectural conservation or ritual and theatrical aspects within theatre historiography. However, they often overlook the intricate interplay between local devotion and state-led restoration, as well as the mutually constitutive relationship between tangible structures and intangible practices.

This study addresses these gaps by integrating fieldwork and archival research to examine how tangible and intangible heritage interact in the preservation of Lord Guan temples and temple theatres. It highlights how state conservation frameworks, community devotion and ritual-theatrical traditions shape one another, thus establishing the foundation for the argument developed in the subsequent sections of this paper.

3. Cultural Significance and Current State of Lord Guan Temples

The cultural and religious significance of Lord Guan temples is inseparable from the long and complex history of Guan Yu 關羽 (d. AD 220), later venerated as Lord Guan (Guangong 關公) and Emperor Guan (Guangdi 關帝). Originally a military general under Liu Bei 劉備 (161–224) of Shu Han 蜀漢 (221–263), Guan Yu's reputation for loyalty and martiality led to his deification from the Sui and Tang periods (581–907) onward and rapid ascent within the Chinese pantheon during the Song period (960–1279). By the Ming (1368–1644) dynasty, he had been officially honoured with the imperial rank of *di* 帝 and accumulated more than 1600 years' worth of posthumous titles. His cult has permeated the religious life of China—including Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism—as well as the daily practices of communities across the country. The circulation of his historical, legendary and mythic narratives, especially through xiqu from the Song-Yuan period onwards, further broadened the reach of his cult and cemented his presence in temple festivals and ritual performances. Nowhere is this more visible than in Haizhou, in southern Shanxi, the heartland of his cult and the setting for many long-standing ritual practices.

Haizhou Lord Guan Temple, recognised as the oldest and largest of its kind, stands as the symbolic centre of this devotional landscape. First built during the Chen (557–589) or the Sui dynasty (557–618) (Chai 2002, p. 11), the Haizhou temple represents the earliest institutionalised form of Lord Guan worship. Yet the spread of his cult was neither confined to Haizhou nor limited to monumental temples. Rural Shanxi—particularly Zezhou, Gaoping and surrounding areas—once hosted dense networks of Lord Guan temples. Yao (2013, p. 40) records 268 Lord Guan temples in Zezhou alone during the Qing dynasty, while Hao and Yang (2019, p. 22) note that every village in Gaoping historically had at least one, with some villages housing multiple temples. Although the Cultural Revolution and urbanisation led to the destruction of many sites, a considerable number still survive, underscoring the historical depth and geographical breadth of the Lord Guan cult.

In the architectural and spatial design of Lord Guan temples, the temple theatre stands out as one of the most iconic features. Shanxi, particularly its Jinnan region, has preserved a rich heritage of xiqu performance, and temple theatres continue to serve as a venue for both ritual and theatrical activities. Theatrical performances staged at Lord Guan temples are not restricted to Lord Guan narratives; plays featuring a wide range of characters and storylines are also common. Likewise, Lord Guan plays may also be performed in temples devoted to other deities, reflecting an established cultural logic in which theatrical performance is both an expression of devotion and an integral part of communal celebra-

tion. Participant observation of the annual ritual performance of ‘Lord Guan Patrols the City’ (*Guangong xuncheng* 關公巡城) during the Lord Guan Temple Festival in Haizhou on 26 May 2023 confirms that ‘blessing’ and ‘play’ remain at the core of the temple festivals for performers, pilgrims and spectators (Tian and Zhao 2025, p. 94). These observations align with the arguments in the Introduction and Literature Review sections, in that *intangible* heritage—ritual practices and theatrical performances—operates in dynamic interplay with the *tangible* structures that host them.

Our fieldwork in Jinnan between 2023 and 2025 further illustrates the diversity and uneven conditions of surviving Lord Guan temples there. Nearly one hundred sites were examined, ranging from single-courtyard (*danjin* 單進) to triple-courtyard (*sanjin* 三進) complexes; as shown in Appendix A, they vary significantly in scale, craftsmanship and condition. At one end of the spectrum stands the meticulously conserved Haizhou Lord Guan Temple (Figure 1). Oriented along a traditional north–south axis, the temple complex—measuring 500 m in length and 216.5 m in width, and covering an area of 108,250 m²—include a sequence of monumental structures: the Main Entrance (*duanmen* 端門), the Pheasant Gate (*zhimen* 雉門), the Theatre Stage, the Meridian Gate, the Wooden Memorial Archway, the Emperor Inscription Tower (*yushu lou* 御書樓), the Hall for the Veneration of Peace (*chongning dian* 崇寧殿) (also called the Main Hall or *zhengdian* 正殿) and the Spring and Autumn Tower (*chunqiu lou* 春秋樓), where Lord Guan’s sculptures are situated. The Garden of Sworn Brothers (*jieyiyuan* 結義園) reinforces the temple’s symbolic associations with loyalty and brotherhood.

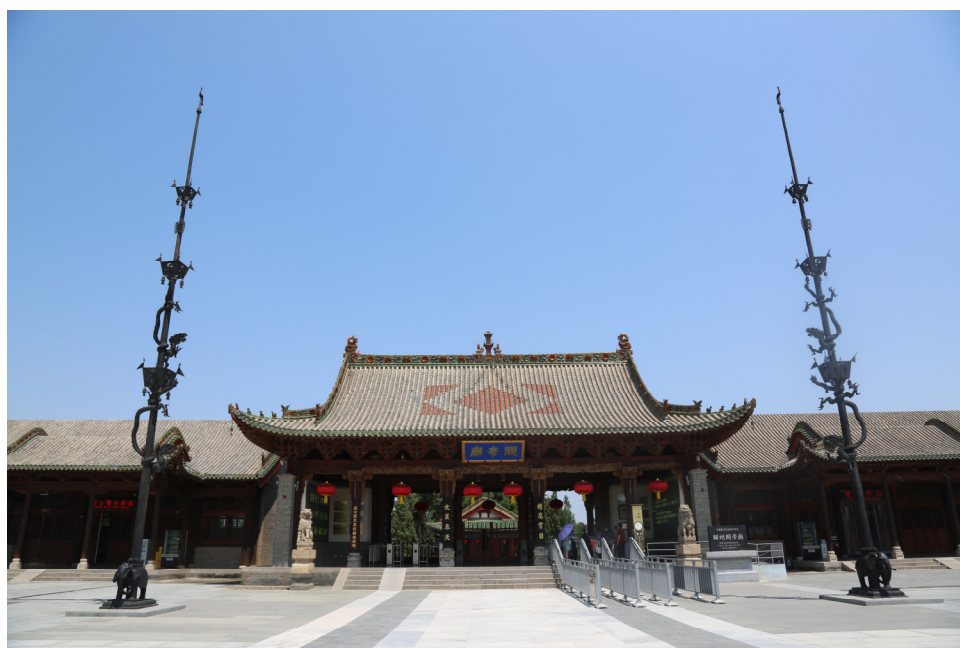


Figure 1. Haizhou Lord Guan Temple. Source: photo taken by the author¹.

In stark contrast, most rural Lord Guan temples are in varying states of decline. Natural degradation—rot, fire, and seismic damage—has been exacerbated by human-induced destruction, most notably the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). In many impoverished villages, limited financial resources prevent timely repairs, leading to the gradual collapse of key structures. In Gangtou 崗頭, Jincheng, for example, villagers set up an altar in the crumbling temple hall and placed a donation box on it to raise funds for restoration (Figure 2). Meanwhile, damage wrought by historical events is often irreversible, as illustrated by the severely defaced sculptures on the eave columns of Lord Guan Temple in Hetaowa 核桃窩, Jincheng (Figure 3). These cases echo the broader issues raised in earlier

sections: formal conservation frameworks may exist, but the survival of both tangible and intangible heritage ultimately depends on local resources, community commitment and the continuing relevance of ritual life.



Figure 2. Gangtou Lord Guan Temple, Jincheng.



Figure 3. Hetaowa Lord Guan Temple, Jincheng.

Taken together, these observations underscore the dual nature of Lord Guan temples as both cultural and architectural relics animated by ongoing ritual and theatrical performance traditions. The wide variation in their current condition—from exemplary preservation in major sites to perilous decay in many rural communities—demonstrates how historical circumstances, economic capacity and community devotion shape their trajectories

in an uneven way. The challenges faced by these temples, therefore, cannot be understood solely in terms of structural conservation. Their long-standing role as centres of ritual life, theatrical expression and local identity means that the safeguarding of these sites must address not only the survival of their material fabric but also the continuity of the practices and meanings that give them life. A sustainable approach to their preservation must therefore recognise the interwoven relationship between built form, cultural memory and living tradition, treating these temples not as static relics but as evolving cultural ecosystems sustained through the interplay of faith, performance and participation in communication.

4. Government-Involved Restoration Efforts

As tangible embodiments of belief and carriers of cultural heritage, Lord Guan temples require preservation strategies that address both their architectural fabric and their embedded ritual life. Government engagement has long shaped the conservation landscape in China, although historical records also reveal significant contradictions. Since the 1960s, the Chinese state has built an extensive legal and administrative framework of cultural heritage protection, and by 2019, a total of 5058 sites had been officially designated as ‘Key National Cultural Heritage Protection Units’ (*quanguo zhongdian wenwubao hu danwei* 全國重點文物保護單位), including 2160 architectural sites (State Council Information Office 2019). At the same time, many historic structures were severely damaged or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, as documented in the ‘List of Cultural Relics Destroyed during the Cultural Revolution’ (Weiji Baike 2025). This historical tension underscores the complexity of state involvement in cultural preservation, which combines both efforts towards protection and episodic destruction.

Today, heritage protection operates through a multi-tiered system of ‘Cultural Relic Protection Units’ (*wenwu baohu danwei* 文物保護單位) at the national, provincial, municipal, and county levels. ‘the Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics’ (*Zhonghuarenmin gongheguo wenwubao hu fa* 中華人民共和國文物保護法, revised in 2024) specifies that national-level Cultural Relics Protection Units are approved by the State Council on the basis of their exceptional historical, artistic, or scientific value, while provincial, municipal and county governments approve protection units at their respective levels, with corresponding obligations for registration and oversight (NCHA 2024, Art. 23). Unclassified immovable cultural relics must also be recorded and publicly announced by the county level (NCHA 2024, Art. 23). This framework establishes the administrative environment in which temples—including Lord Guan temples—are managed, funded and prioritised for conservation.

Haizhou Lord Guan Temple exemplifies this hierarchical system. First designated as a provincial-level Cultural Relic Protection Unit in 1957 and elevated to the status of a Key National Cultural Relic Protection Unit in 1988, the temple has benefited from significant state investment. According to Fu Wenyuan 傅文元, head of the Bureau of Cultural Relics for Haizhou Lord Guan Temple, its prominence has resulted in preferential government funding. From 2010 to 2012, the National Development and Reform Commission allocated 74 million yuan to resurface temple grounds and rebuild walls. Between 2015 and 2016, an additional 17.43 million yuan was used to restore major architectural components—including the Main Gate, the Pheasant Gate, the Meridian Gate, the Main Hall and 183 side halls—as well as the Halls of the Princes and the Sacrifice Hall in the Changping Ancestral Shrine were also repaired (Fu, personal interview, 31 January 2024).

Government involvement is also evident in county-level protection and restoration. In Guozhuang village, Gaoping, for example, a Lord Guan temple was undergoing extensive repairs during our 2024 fieldwork (Figure 4). The village head, Yang Wenguang 楊文廣, explained that the restoration was part of the ‘new countryside construction’ (*xin*

nongcun jianshe 新農村建設) initiative aimed at preventing further deterioration and supporting tourism development. Because many local temples had been damaged during the Cultural Revolution, the municipal government invested over one million yuan to commission a professional restoration team, supplemented by donations from local enterprises and villagers. Through coordinated planning, bidding and expert oversight, the temple has now been restored to excellent condition (Figure 5), and an application for county-level cultural relics protection status has been submitted (Yang, personal interview, 1 June 2024).



Figure 4. Guozhuang Lord Guan Temple under restoration.



Figure 5. Guozhuang Lord Guan Temple after restoration (photo courtesy of Yang Wenguang).

These examples demonstrate that governmental involvement—while uneven across regions—provides essential resources, regulatory oversight and technical capacity. Yet state interventions alone cannot meet the massive demand for preservation among the countless Lord Guan temples scattered across Shanxi, highlighting the indispensable role of community-based devotion and grassroots action.

5. Local Devotion and Grassroots Restoration Efforts

Parallel to formal state initiatives, grassroots protection and restoration arise from deep-rooted devotion to Lord Guan and a strong sense of community responsibility. Villagers emphasise that the incense offered to Lord Guan reflects accumulated merit and that a neglected or closed temple—where worship must take place outdoors—constitutes disrespect or even blasphemy (Anonym, personal interview, 30 June 2023). Personal testimonies further illustrate this devotion. One villager recounted surviving a near-fatal crash, attributing it to Lord Guan’s divine protection; he continues to maintain the temple as an expression of gratitude to the deity (Anonym, personal interview, 1 June 2023).

However, relying solely on local contributions often leads to prolonged or incomplete repairs. B. Yang (2023, p. 154) notes that the restoration of the Fucheng Lord Guan Temple in Zezhou took more than 20 years due to a lack of funds and community disunity, despite persistent efforts by the merchant Xu Youli. Such challenges persist today. One elderly temple keeper shared that incense money (*xianghuo qian* 香火錢) barely covers basic maintenance costs, and that a recent burglary emptied the donation box, leaving her uncertain how to fund repairs that year (Anonym, personal interview, 27 May 2023). Another temple keeper, believing us to be officials from the Cultural Relics Bureau, excitedly identified areas in need of repair in the hope that the restoration work would begin soon.

Technical challenges compound financial constraints. In some villages—especially those with limited economic resources—non-professional renovations have left temples, such as at Lord Guan Temple in Taoyuan Village, Zezhou County (Figure 6), looking newly built and lacking historical authenticity. While such repairs reflect local initiatives, they compromise the architectural integrity that gives temple structures their cultural significance, as emphasised by Liang (1935). These cases contrast sharply with the high-standard conservation work at the Haizhou Lord Guan Temple, illustrating how disparities in resources and expertise shape the fates of rural temples.

In many places, protection remains nominal. Even county-level Cultural Relic Protection Units do not always ensure preservation. During our 2023 fieldwork in Jishan County, we attempted to locate the Lord Guan Temple in Wucheng Village, which is officially registered as a county-level Cultural Relics Protection Unit. After repeated inquiries and extensive searching, we discovered a Cultural Relic Protection Stele concealed in the grass. Although the stele inscription, dated 18 August 2006, recorded the existence of a stage in the Lord Guan Temple, the stage itself was nowhere to be found. Only after reaching a partially bricked-up side door and climbing over the wall did we identify remnants of the structure. The front of the stage is now blocked by a wall that forms part of a residential courtyard (Figure 7). Inside, debris and rubbish are scattered across the ground; the roof has deteriorated, and the main beam bears an inscription indicating that the structure dates to the Daoguang reign of the Qing dynasty (1820–1850). The faded mural on the wall still hinted at the temple’s former splendour.



Figure 6. Taoyuan Lord Guan Temple, Zezhou County.



Figure 7. The stage of Wucheng Lord Guan Temple, Jishan.

The gap between legal designation and practical protection reflects structural challenges. For example, protective boundaries and construction control zones—defined according to the classification level and architectural type of each site—are intended to safeguard. At Haizhou Lord Guan Temple, the protected zone extends 5–35 m beyond the exterior walls, with a construction control zone extending 100–500 m further. Yet, such regulations require enforcement capacity and continuous monitoring—an unrealistic expectation given the sheer number of rural temples. As a result, many protected sites have deteriorated or even disappeared, underscoring the limitations of state oversight and the urgent need for coordinated, community-centred strategies.

6. Professional Restoration Practices and Technical Challenges

Professional restoration plays a critical role in maintaining the authenticity and longevity of Lord Guan temples, particularly where local resources are insufficient. Yet, effective professional intervention depends on specialised expertise, appropriate materials and adherence to conservation principles that prioritise authenticity and respect for original structure.

Gao Tengfei 郜騰飛, a construction team manager in Jincheng with over a decade of experience in architectural restoration, described his team's meticulous procedures (Gao, personal interview, 1 June 2023). Restoration typically begins with consultation with stele inscriptions and close architectural analysis, which informs repair plans tailored to each structure. Among the challenges, sourcing matching glazed tiles was particularly difficult because kilns produce only limited tile sizes that must align with the temple's specific roof scales. Bracket sets represented the highest expense, with two-layered brackets crafted from Chinese rosewood (*huanghuali* 黃花梨) costing RMB 1000 *yuan* each, while pinewood alternatives were priced at 200 *yuan* each. Labour charges followed, with skilled workers paid 300 *yuan* daily for constructing main structures and general labourers earning 150 *yuan* daily for support tasks like delivering bricks.

Gao emphasised that the primary goal of restoration was protection, making it essential to preserve original components, such as bracket sets. Their focus included repairing the roofs of the Main Hall, stage and side halls, along with interior decoration, altar renovation and the restoration of niches and sculptures.

Technical measures for protecting wooden structures are essential. As both Gao and Fu noted, fireproofing, insect prevention, moisture control and corrosion protection must all be carefully implemented. Historical records document devastating fires that have destroyed temples multiple times, while bats' excrement corrodes roof beams. Moistureproofing is vital for preserving walls, murals and sculptures, and protective coatings are required to prevent structural erosion in wooden columns and beams.

These technical challenges highlight the importance of professional expertise in balancing restoration needs with authenticity principles. They also reinforce a central theme of this study: safeguarding Lord Guan temples requires integrating faith, form, material practice, and community involvement. Only by aligning governmental resources, local devotion and professional knowledge can these temples—both their tangible structures and the intangible traditions they sustain—be preserved as living heritage for generations to come.

7. Preservation of Intangible Heritage: Temple Theatre and Ritual Practice

Conservation extends beyond architecture to encompass intangible cultural heritage (ICH), the practices, representations, expressions, skills and knowledge, through which communities transmit meaning and identity (UNESCO 2003, Art. 2). Rather than static relics, ICH is a dynamic process through which communities continuously reinterpret inherited traditions in relation to their environment and history, thereby reinforcing collective identity and cultural continuity (UNESCO 2003, Art. 2). Summarising UNESCO's position, the domains of ICH cover oral traditions and expressions (including language), performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events; these living practices are essential to how people make sense of, and enact, their heritage.

Fieldwork in southern Shanxi indicates that, even when interviewees did not explicitly use the word 'identity', many expressed a strong sense of being descendants of Lord Guan, regarding him as a moral exemplar whose virtues they feel obliged to inherit and embody through ritual activities. This lived devotion exemplifies cultural in-

heritance and reinterpretation in modern society. As Alivizatou (2012, p. 18) observes, the significance of intangible heritage lies in ‘the creative engagement with the past in a present; a past that is manifested in cultural practices and revived traditions that reflect contemporary identities.’

ICH also functions as the interpretative lens through which tangible heritage acquires meaning, ‘transforming inert landscapes of objects and monuments, turning them into living archives of cultural values’ (Munjeri 2004, p. 18), thereby revitalising temples as sites of lived history. In practice, ritual and theatrical performances during temple festivals bring vitality and incense offerings to the temple, reaffirm the temple’s role as a focal point of communal belief and sustain cultural continuity. In this sense, *faith* (practice, performance, and participation) and *form* (architectural fabric and spatial layout) are mutually reinforcing—each sustains the other’s relevance and durability.

8. Discussion: Balancing Devotion, Authenticity and Sustainability

China’s evolving legal and policy environment provides the formal scaffolding for heritage protection, from the Cultural Relics Protection Law (first implemented in 1982, revised in 2022, with a comprehensive update taking effect on 1 March 2025) to The Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage (effective 1 June 2011). These instruments strengthen management mechanisms, penalties and digital integration for documentation, and aim to balance state oversight with public participation and sustainable use. Read together with policy documents such as the 2011 Opinions, they form a multi-layered framework intended to support tangible and intangible heritage.

Despite these legal and policy advances, practical tensions persist, particularly around the use of historic temple theatres. Wooden-structured temple theatres—highly valued as cultural relics—are often prohibited from live performance to avoid damage. To meet ritual and communal needs without compromising conservation, new concrete-structured theatre stages have been built in some villages. This solution helps sustain performance traditions yet raises questions about authenticity and the cultural integrity of experience.

Field observations clarify this negotiation. In Qiangxia, a village in Yuncheng, the Lord Guan Temple is a nationally protected Major Historical and Cultural Site protected with a theatre dating back to the Kangxi reign of the Qing dynasty (1662–1722). During the Lantern Festival, villagers gather in the Main Hall of the temple to offer incense and donations, while xiqu is staged in a concrete-structured theatre at the village committee square. According to the temple manager (Zhang, personal interview, 4 February 2023), the original temple theatre remains closed to performances because frequent use could damage its fragile structure; government investment in new theatres enables ritual performance and theatrical entertainment without endangering heritage assets. Similar arrangements recur across many rural villages, highlighting the ongoing negotiation between conserving material heritage and sustaining living traditions.

These restrictions inevitably affect perceptions of authenticity. Concrete stages enable festivals, xiqu performances and community gatherings, but they cannot replicate the historical experience of watching xiqu in the temple theatre, where performances were offered first and foremost to the temple god(s). Thus, measures designed to safeguard material heritage may simultaneously alter the cultural meanings and practices they aim to preserve, underscoring the persistent tension between conservation, authenticity and cultural integrity.

Local governments also adopt different approaches. In some places—for example, Nanzhuang Lord Guan Temple in Xinjiang County (Figure 8)—performances continue inside temple theatres after reinforcement with concrete to meet safety and load-bearing requirements. This option is more convenient and economical than restoring a traditional

wooden stage, yet it compromises material authenticity, prompting questions about ethical restoration and the thresholds of acceptable interventions.



Figure 8. The stage of Nanzhang Lord Guan Temple, Xinjiang.

International guidance underscores why these choices matter. The UNESCO 2025 revised Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention emphasise that properties must meet integrity and/or authenticity conditions and maintain adequate protection and management systems to be considered of Outstanding Universal Value, in order to ensure their safeguarding (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2025, Art. 78). The guidelines also point out that authenticity concerns the extent to which cultural values are expressed through its various attributes, including form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions, techniques, and management systems (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2025, Art. 82).

The purpose of respecting authenticity is to highlight the local value of heritage (Liang et al. 2023, p. 5). Respecting authenticity, therefore, prioritises originality, discouraging over-repair, and cautions against fabricating a false sense of the ancient. Over-restored temples and temple theatres may appear new but have lost their original authenticity and local value. Authenticity also requires retaining multilayered historical traces during restoration and conservation: many wooden-structured temples—particularly those from the Yuan and Ming periods—have undergone repeated repairs, leaving stratified evidence of different eras. In some rural areas, temples and temple theatres were repurposed as barns or classrooms in the 1950s; these layers remain part of the site’s unique cultural biography, whereas new concrete theatre stages built outside the temple complexes cannot embody such continuity, as they sever the link between past and present that is embodied in the original space.

Authenticity is also context-sensitive; it may define a valid approach in a given time, context, and specific typology of cultural heritage (Tomaszek 2022, p. 80). In East Asian practice, Liang’s (1963, p. 6) principle of ‘restoring the old as it was’ contrasts with both the approach of Viollet-le-Duc (1875, p. 14) and the principles of the Venice Charter that emphasise distinct contemporary additions (ICOMOS 1965, Art. 9). In the Chinese legal framework, restoration and maintenance must not alter the original state of cultural relics and should minimise intervention to ensure authenticity and integrity (NCHA 2024,

Art. 32). These standards provide ethical direction for balancing devotion (continued ritual use) with authenticity (respect for historical fabric).

Beyond authenticity, sustainable preservation requires integrating government capacity and community commitment. Over-repair often arises from varying causes: local policies or funding priorities in some regions, and strong piety in others. Stele inscriptions sometimes celebrate ‘an entirely new look’, reflecting a devotional logic that the temple—as the deity’s home—should be renewed like one’s own residence; neglect would be regarded as disrespectful and even blasphemous.

At the same time, the sheer number of heritage buildings in China and the limited financing at village and county levels means many designated sites remain dilapidated—even when a Cultural Relic Protection Stele stands at the gate. The observation of Wucheng Lord Guan Temple illustrates how residential encroachments, insufficient funds and weak enforcement undermine practical conservation despite formal designation.

For long-term visibility, the primary strategy is to combine the conservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The values of cultural property should be assessed through an interactive matrix that relates cultural (ritual, performance, and meaning) and physical (material, form, and fabric) properties (Munjeri 2004, p. 16). Local ritual and theatrical traditions help activate temples. Implementation demands shared responsibility: government and community stakeholders must cooperate to preserve both architectural integrity and living traditions, supported by regular inspection, maintenance, capacity-building and technical guidance that aligns with conservation principles.

9. Conclusions

Drawing on fieldwork in Jinnan or southern Shanxi (2023–2025), this study examines how the conservation of Lord Guan temples and the preservation of associated intangible cultural heritage are intertwined, and how restoration practices unfold across state-funded and grassroots contexts. Rather than treating architecture and practice as separate domains, this study highlights their mutually reinforcing relationship: ritual practices, theatrical performances, and temple festivals animate faith and enhance and sustain the cultural meaning of the temples, while the temple architecture anchors these practices, enabling historical and cultural continuity.

The study also compares the roles of different actors in heritage conservation. Local community initiatives, motivated by devotion to Lord Guan, often prioritise ritual continuity and social engagement, but often face financial, technical, and organisational constraints. In contrast, government-led projects, exemplified by Haizhou Lord Guan Temple, benefit from dedicated funding, professional technical support, and institutionalised management, often integrating tourism and cultural promotion to generate revenue while safeguarding heritage.

In practice, integrated preservation approaches are essential: official requirements should be harmonised with local practices and religious use, maintaining authenticity while respecting ethical considerations and sustaining living traditions. International guidance likewise stresses the value of integrating scientific expertise with local knowledge, collaborative governance and climate-aware resilience planning; in a heritage context, this means sustained cooperation among bureaucracies, experts and communities to balance protection with ongoing use.

In summary, sustainable preservation of Lord Guan temples depends on recognising and managing the interdependence of *faith* and *form*. By treating temples as living cultural ecosystems—where architectural conservation and ritual/theatrical practice are coordinated—stakeholders can safeguard material integrity while nurturing the social energies that keep these sites alive. Only through collaborative engagement and continuous,

context-sensitive care can Lord Guan temples continue to serve their ritual and social functions for generations to come.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, X.Z.; Methodology, Y.T. and X.Z.; Formal analysis, Y.T. and X.Z.; Investigation, Y.T.; Resources, Y.T.; Writing—original draft, Y.T.; Writing—review & editing, X.Z.; Supervision, X.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the Australian Research Council through its Discovery Project, ‘The Transformation of Chinese Temple Theatre Architecture’ (Grant No. DP250100454).

Institutional Review Board Statement: This study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney in 2023 (Approval No. 2022/803). The research was conducted in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2007, updated 2018) and the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (1975, revised 2013).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments: We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Fu Wenyuan, Yang Wenguang, Gao Tengfei, Zhang Xiaolong, and others, as well as to the anonymous interviewees, for their generous assistance during the fieldwork conducted between 2023 and 2025. Their insights and support greatly contributed to the completion of this study. We would also like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions, which significantly improved the clarity and rigour of this manuscript, as well as the editor for their careful and efficient handling of the review process. Their guidance and constructive feedback have been invaluable in strengthening the quality of this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Architectural and preservation profiles of Lord Guan temples and temple theatres in Southern Shanxi ¹.

No.	Location	Architecture (Layout & Orientation)	Theatre Structure (Bays/Width/Depth)	Deity(ies) Enshrined	Date (Inscription/ Estimated)	State of Preservation
1	Xiyin village, Xiangyuan county	Single- courtyard complex; east-facing	5 bays; approx. 7.45 m (W) × 6.01 m (D)	Lord Guan; Guanyin; Third Dragon Lord	Stele Inscription: reconstructed in the 37th year of Qianlong (1772)	Good
2	Cuijialing village, Xiangyuan county	Single- courtyard complex; west-facing	3 bays; approx. 6.86 m (W) × 5.42 m (D)	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: reconstructed in the 7th year of Xianfeng (1857)	Good
3	Baonao village, Xiangyuan county	Single- courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.55 m (W) × 4.97 m (D)	Lord Guan; Tudi; Three officials	Beam Inscription: built in the Jiaqing reign; reconstructed in the 22nd year of Guangxu (1896)	Fair
4	Xialiang village, Xiangyuan county	Single- courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.42 m (W) × 5.38 m (D)	Lord Guan; Tudi; Guanyin	Beam Inscription: rebuilt in 2009	Fair

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Location	Architecture (Layout & Orientation)	Theatre Structure (Bays/Width/Depth)	Deity(ies) Enshrined	Date (Inscription/ Estimated)	State of Preservation
5	Baiyangling village, Xiangyuan county	Single-courtyard complex; southwest-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.89 m (W) × 4.96 m (D)	Lord Guan; Tudi; Guanyin	Beam Inscription: built in the 14th year of Daoguang (1834)	Poor
6	Xiaqingnan village, Xiangyuan county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.78 m (W) × 4.91 m (D)	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: reconstructed in 2006	Good
7	Shangsi beilu, Xiangyuan county	Single-courtyard complex; east-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.65 m (W) × 4.87 m (D)	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: reconstructed in Yongle reign; reconstructed in the 24th year of Jiajing (1545)	Good
8	Wangqiao village, Xiangyuan county	Single-courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays; approx. 10.62 m (W) × 3.88 m (D)	Lord Guan; The God of Wealth; Guanyin; Kṣitigarbha	Stele Inscription: built in Jiajing reign; reconstructed in 2010	Excellent
9	Tiancang village, Xiangyuan county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.85 m (W) × 3.23 m (D)	Lord Guan	Beam Inscription: built in the 10th year of Tongzhi (1871)	Bad
10	Xiqiaodi village, Xiangyuan county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Critical
11	Changlong village, Xiangyuan county	Single-courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays; approx. 9.37 m (W) × 4.00 m (D)	Lord Guan; The God of Culture and Literature; Truly Valiant Great Emperor	Beam Inscription: built in the 26th year of Qianlong (1761)	Excellent
12	Lizhuang village, Lucheng district	Two-courtyard complex; northwest-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.51 m (W) × 5.46 m (D)	Lord Guan	Estimated: The Late Ming dynasty	Excellent
13	Beishe village, Lucheng district	Single-courtyard complex; west-facing	3 bays; approx. 9.43 m (W) × 5.39 m (D)	Lord Guan; Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓; Bull Demon King	Stele Inscription: Jiajing reign period	Good
14	Dongbeichen village, Lucheng district	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	Interior stage	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in 5th year of Guangxu (1879)	Critical
15	Laodong village, Yangcheng county	Single-courtyard complex; east-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan; Bull Demon King; the Mountain God	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 4th year of the Republic of China (1915)	Critical
16	Shuangmei village, Yangcheng county	Single-courtyard complex; east-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.28 m (W) × 4.53 m (D)	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 9th year of Jiaqing (1804)	Very poor

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Location	Architecture (Layout & Orientation)	Theatre Structure (Bays/Width/Depth)	Deity(ies) Enshrined	Date (Inscription/ Estimated)	State of Preservation
17	Sanquan village, Xiangyuan county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 6.74 m (W) × 5.11 m (D)	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 29th year of Qianlong (1764)	Very poor
18	Wozhuang village, Yangchen county	Two-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.39 m (W) × 5.51 m (D)	Lord Guan; Gaomei; The King of Ma; The King of Niu; The God of Wealth; Taishang Laojun; The Four Saints; Three Buddhas; The Medicine King; The Founder	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 23rd year of Kangxi (1684)	Excellent
19	Mazhai village, Yangcheng county	Single-courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan	Beam Inscription: built in the 6th year of Tongzhi (1867)	Bad
20	Huayuantiao village, Yangcheng county	Two-courtyard complex; west-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.37 m (W) × 5.17 m (D)	Lord Guan	Beam Inscription: rebuilt in the 7th year of Xianfeng (1857)	Very poor
21	Pangou village, Yangcheng county	Two-courtyard complex; northwest-facing	5 bays; approx. 10.98 m (W) × 4.77 m (D)	Lord Guan; Taishao Laojun; The God of Wealth; The King of Niu; Guanyin; Confucius; The Maiden Who Brings Children	Stele Inscription: built in the 53rd year of Kangxi (1714)	Excellent
22	Nanliu village, Yangcheng county	Single-courtyard complex; west-facing	3 bays; approx. 5.77 m (W) × 4.71 m (D)	Lord Guan	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Bad
23	Cuodui village, Yangcheng county	Single-courtyard complex; west-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.32 m (W) × 5.74 m (D)	Lord Guan; The King of Niu; The God of Mountains	Beam Inscription: the 21st year of Daoguang (1841)	Fair
24	Wujiang village, Jincheng city	Two-courtyard complex; east-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan; The Maiden Who Brings Children; The King of Ma	Beam Inscription: built in the 38th year of Qianlong (1773)	Good
25	Xiaoji village, Zezhou county	Two-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.62 m (W) × 5.15 m (D)	Lord Guan; The Grand Dame; The King of Ma	Stele Inscription: built in the 6th year of Kangxi (1667); rebuilt in the 52nd year of Kangxi (1713)	Excellent

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Location	Architecture (Layout & Orientation)	Theatre Structure (Bays/Width/Depth)	Deity(ies) Enshrined	Date (Inscription/ Estimated)	State of Preservation
26	Hetaowa village, Jincheng city	Two-courtyard complex, south-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.18 m (W) × 4.68 m (D)	Lord Guan; The King of Dragon; The Grand Dame	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in 11th year of Wanli (1583); rebuilt in 13th year of Qianlong (1748)	Excellent
27	Nanyan village, Jincheng city	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 6.39 m (W) × 4.84 m (D)	Lord Guan; Ksitigarbha; Guanyin	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Excellent
28	Jiaoshan village, Jincheng city	Two-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.91 m (W) × 5.05 m (D)	Lord Guan	Beam Inscription: Rebuilt in the 13th year of the Republic of China (1924)	Fair
29	Niushan village, Jincheng city	Two-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.71 m (W) × 4.68 m (D)	Lord Guan; The King of Medicine; Ksitigarbha; Taishang Laojun; Guanyin	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 9th year of Jiaqing (1804)	Good
30	Zhonghedong village, Jincheng city	Two-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan; The Founder; The God of Wealth; Taishang Laojun; The God of Culture and Literature	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 31st year of Guangxu (1905)	Good
31	Gangtou village, Jincheng city	Single courtyard; south-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Critical
32	Shenjiazhuang village, Jincheng city	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Very poor
33	Xiajiang village, Jincheng city	Two-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.19 m (W) × 5.04 m (D)	Lord Guan; The Jade Emperor; King Yan; Laozi	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 2nd year of Chongzhen (1629)	Good
34	Beiyin village, Zezhou county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan; Sakyamuni; Ksitigarbha; Guanyin; Taishang Laojun; Confucius	Stele Inscription: built in the 9th year of Yongzheng (1731)	Fair
35	Fucheng village, Zezhou county	Triple-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays	Omitted	Stele Inscription: the 1st year of Qingyuan (1195)	Excellent

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Location	Architecture (Layout & Orientation)	Theatre Structure (Bays/Width/Depth)	Deity(ies) Enshrined	Date (Inscription/ Estimated)	State of Preservation
36	Dongwangtai village, Jincheng city	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.18 m (W) × 4.92 m (D)	Lord Guan; Gaomei; The God of Silkworm; The Gods of Five Pestilence; The King of Ma; The God of Wealth; Taishang Laojun	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 6th year of Guangxu (1880)	Excellent
37	Xiyuanqing village, Zezhou county	Single-courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.43 m (W) × 5.08 m (D)	Lord Guan; The God of Wealth; The Grand Dame; Taishang Laojun; Confucius	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 20th year of Daoguang (1840)	Good
38	Taoyuan village, Zezhou county	Single-courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan; The King of Ma; The King of Niu; The Grand Dame	Beam Inscription: built in the 27th year of Qianlong (1762)	Good
39	Gaodu village, Zezhou county	Two-courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.59 m (W) × 5.26 m (D)	Lord Guan; Taishang Laojun; The God of Wealth	Stele Inscription: built in the 17th year of Jiaqing (1812)	Excellent
40	Lizhuang village, Zezhou county	N/A ²	N/A	Lord Guan	N/A	Critical
41	Baofu village, Zezhou county	N/A	N/A	Lord Guan	N/A	Critical
42	Erfeنجie village, Xiangyuan county	Two-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.38 m (W) × 5.26 m (D)	Lord Guan; Taishang Laojun; The God of Wealth; Confucius; The God of Medicine	Beam Inscription: built in the 6th year of Qianlong (1741)	Excellent
43	Du village, Gaoping city	Single-courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.01 m (W) × 5.11 m (D)	Lord Guan	Beam Inscription: built in the 36th year of Qianlong (1771)	Good
44	Zhujiashuang village, Gaoping city	Two-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Bad
45	Changle village, Gaoping city	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 6.67 m (W) × 5.11 m (D)	Lord Guan; Gaomei	Stele Inscription: built in the 12th year of Wanli (1584); rebuilt in the 57th year of Qianlong (1792)	Good

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Location	Architecture (Layout & Orientation)	Theatre Structure (Bays/Width/Depth)	Deity(ies) Enshrined	Date (Inscription/ Estimated)	State of Preservation
46	Jiaohe village, Gaoping city	N/A	N/A	Lord Guan	N/A	Critical
47	Meiyezhuang village, Gaoping city	Single- courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays; approx. 6.79 m (W) × 5.72 m (D)	Lord Guan; Gaomei; Six Kings	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 12th year of Jiaqing (1807)	Fair
48	Xiaoxian village, Gaoping city	Two- courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 9.61 m (W) × 5.92 m (D)	Lord Guan; The King of Niu; The King of Ma	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Fair
49	Nanxuzhuang village, Gaoping city	N/A	N/A	Lord Guan	N/A	Critical
50	Beiling village, Gaoping city	Single- courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan; Guanyin	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Fair
51	Kangying village, Gaoping city	Single- courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 6.11 m (W) × 4.84 m (D)	Lord Guan	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Good
52	Kangying village, Gaoping city	N/A	N/A	Lord Guan	N/A	Critical
53	Yuancun village, Gaoping city	Single- courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 5.43 m (W) × 4.51 m (D)	Lord Guan; Taishang Laojun; Confucius	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 20th year of Jiaqing (1815)	Fair
54	Guozhuang village, Gaoping city	Single- courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.81 m (W) × 4.92 m (D)	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: built in Hongwu reign period; rebuilt in the 9th year of Wanli (1581)	Good
55	Shitanghui village, Gaoping city	N/A	N/A	Lord Guan	N/A	Critical
56	Nanzhaozhuang village, Gaoping city	Two- courtyard complex; west-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.71 m (W) × 4.58 m (D)	Lord Guan; The Maiden Who Brings Children	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 3rd year of Daoguang (1823)	Bad
57	Zhuangzi village, Gaoping city	Two- courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.65 m (W) × 5.70 m (D)	Lord Guan; Zhao Gongming; The God of River; The Grand Dame; Confucius; Amitābha; Vairocana; The Buddha	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 5th year of Tongzhi (1866); Beam Inscription: rebuilt in the Qianlong reign period	Fair

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Location	Architecture (Layout & Orientation)	Theatre Structure (Bays/Width/Depth)	Deity(ies) Enshrined	Date (Inscription/ Estimated)	State of Preservation
58	Dongshang village, Gaoping city	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.34 m (W) × 6.01 m (D)	Lord Guan; The Dragon King; The God of Silkworm; The Three Saints; The King of Ma; The King of Niu;	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 50th year of Kangxi (1711)	Good
59	Nanwangzhuang village, Gaoping city	Single-courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.60 m (W) × 6.25 m (D)	Lord Guan;	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Fair
60	Beigou village, Gaoping city	Single-courtyard complex; east-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.53 m (W) × 5.51 m (D)	Lord Guan	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Fair
61	Anjia village, Gaoping city	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 47th year of Qianlong (1782)	Very poor
62	Juzhuang village, Gaoping city	Single-courtyard complex; west-facing	exterior stage; 3 bays; approx. 9.65 m (W) × 6.50 m (D)	Lord Guan	Estimated: The Qing dynasty	Good
63	Bangou village, Gaoping city	N/A	exterior stage	Lord Guan	N/A	Critical
64	Xishayuan village, Gaoping city	Two-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.50 m (W) × 5.70 m (D)	Lord Guan; Gaomei; The Grand Dame; The God of Silkworm	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 24th year of Qianlong (1759)	Good
65	Shihe village, Gaoping city	Single-courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.33 m (W) × 5.26 m (D)	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 31st year of Daoguang (1851)	Good
66	Qiuizi village, Gaoping city	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	Inside: 3 bays; approx. 7.56 m (W) × 4.80 m (D); Outside: 3 bays; approx. 9.23 m (W) × 7.08 m (D)	Lord Guan	Beam Inscription: rebuilt in the 25th year of Daoguang (1845)	Good
67	Xiaohuigou village, Gaoping city	Single-courtyard complex; north-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.25 m (W) × 5.96 m (D)	Lord Guan; The King of Ma; Hou Yi; The Grand Dame	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 22nd year of Daoguang (1842)	Fair
68	Quanzhang village, Wanrong county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	Exterior stage	Lord Guan	Beam Inscription: rebuilt in the 13th year of Chenghua (1477)	Excellent
69	Longxiang village, Xinjiang county	Two-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 4.40 m (W) × 7.06 m (D)	Lord Guan	Estimated: in the Yuan dynasty. Beam Inscription: rebuilt in 11th the year of Daoguang (1831)	Excellent

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Location	Architecture (Layout & Orientation)	Theatre Structure (Bays/Width/Depth)	Deity(ies) Enshrined	Date (Inscription/ Estimated)	State of Preservation
70	Nanzhang village, Xinjiang county	Single-courtyard complex; east-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.96 m (W) × 7.00 m (D)	Lord Guan	Beam Inscription and Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 11th year of Daoguang (1831)	Good
71	Zhangzhuang village, Xinjiang county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan	Estimated: in the Qing dynasty	Critical
72	Sanjie village, Jishan county	Single-courtyard complex	3 bays; approx. 10.15 m (W) × 7.03 m (D)	Lord Guan	Estimated: the Qing dynasty	Very poor
73	Xishe village, Jishan county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 13.78 m (W) × 4.83 m (D)	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 5th year of Shunzhi (1648)	Good
74	Renyi village, Jishan county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 9.62 m (W) × 7.71 m (D)	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 37th year of Jiajing (1558)	Good
75	Dongwu village, Wanrong county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	N/A	Lord Guan; The Maiden Who Brings Children; The King of Medicine	Beam Inscription: rebuilt in the 10th year of Chongzhen (1637)	Good
76	Yanjing village, Wanrong county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	N/A	Lord Guan	Estimated: in the Qing dynasty	Fair
77	Dongjiazhuang village, Jishan county	Single-courtyard complex; east-facing	N/A	Lord Guan	Beam Inscription: rebuilt in the 14th year of Guangxu (1888)	Poor
78	Wucheng village, Jishan county	N/A	3 bays	Lord Guan	Estimated: in the Qing dynasty	Critical
79	Liuwu village, Wanrong county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	N/A	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 21st year of Jiaqing (1816)	Poor
80	Shidao village, Ruicheng county	South-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.47 m(W) × 6.83 m (D)	Lord Guan	Estimated: in the Qing dynasty	Very poor
81	Fengxi village, Ruicheng county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.73 m (W) × 5.88 m (D)	Lord Guan	Estimated: in the Qing dynasty	Bad
82	Hongyuan village, Jishan county	Single-courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 7.55 m (W) × 6.35 m (D)	Lord Guan	Estimated: in the Qing dynasty	Fair

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Location	Architecture (Layout & Orientation)	Theatre Structure (Bays/Width/Depth)	Deity(ies) Enshrined	Date (Inscription/ Estimated)	State of Preservation
83	Zhaili village, Yuncheng city	Two- courtyard complex; south-facing	N/A	Lord Guan	Estimated: in the Yuan dynasty	Good
84	Puletou village, Yongji city	North-facing	3 bays	Lord Guan	Estimated: in the Yuan dynasty	Fair
85	Changping town, Yuncheng city	Omitted	Omitted	Omitted	Omitted	Excellent
86	Haizhou town, Yuncheng city	Omitted	Omitted	Omitted	Omitted	Excellent
87	Peijie village, Yuncheng city	Two- courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.61 m (W) × 6.98 m (D)	Lord Guan	Beam Inscription: rebuilt in the 30th year of Wanli (1602)	Good
88	Qiangxia village, Yuncheng city	Triple- courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 8.93 m (W) × 6.32 m (D)	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 3rd year of Shunzhi (1646)	Excellent
89	Yanhu district, Yuncheng city	Triple- courtyard complex; west-facing	N/A	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 25th year of Wanli (1597)	Excellent
90	Chesihou village, Xia county	Two- courtyard complex; northwest- facing	3 bays; approx. 8.91 m (W) × 5.42 m (D)	Lord Guan	Beam Inscription: rebuilt in the 3rd year of Daoguang (1823)	Fair
91	Xia county	Two- courtyard complex; south-facing	3 bays; approx. 10.33 m (W) × 6.08 m (D)	Lord Guan	Stele Inscription: rebuilt in the 10th year of Shunzhi (1653)	Excellent

¹ This table is adapted from an unpublished thesis, The University of Sydney. ² Data not available due to the temple's critical structural condition at the time of survey.

Notes

¹ All photos were taken by the author unless otherwise stated.

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