Art & Design Research Vol.7 Iss.1 2026
https://doi.org/10.37420/j.adr.2026.001

Space and Cultural Context: Cultural Genes of Traditional Vernacular Architecture in the Jianghan Plain

Yin Yi*, Hu Zhongbao
School of Arts, Jingchu University of Technology, Huibei, China
***Corresponding author e-mail: 529885477@qq.com**

Abstract:
Traditional vernacular dwellings in the Jianghan Plain are spatial forms generated through the long-term interaction of water-network geomorphology, agrarian civilization, and clan-based society, carrying the region's historical memory and cultural identity. This study adopts "space and cultural context" as its analytical framework to explore and interpret the cultural genes of traditional dwellings in the Jianghan Plain. The research indicates that, from a historical perspective, the spatial prototype has developed a mechanism of "stable core with variable surface" through prolonged evolution, which lays the foundation for the continuity and sustainability of dwelling forms. In the spatial dimension, the courtyard pattern transforms ritual ethics into residential order through hierarchical layout, while the chuandou timber structure and patio system embody the adaptive wisdom to the humid and watery environment; meanwhile, decorative motifs constitute highly recognizable symbolic vocabularies. In the dimension of cultural context, ritual practices, folk customs, and craftsmanship continuously activate architectural space through everyday life and ceremonial behavior, enabling traditional dwellings to become meaningful fields that carry clan memory and cultural identity. The coupling of these three dimensions forms a cultural gene system characterized by structural, practical, and symbolic attributes.

Keywords:
Jianghan Plain, Traditional Vernacular Dwellings, Cultural Genes, Spatial Form, Cultural Continuity

1. Cultural Genes in the Historical Dimension: Environment, Typology, and Evolution

1.1 Environmental Foundation: Geographical Configuration and Cultural Context

The Jianghan Plain (Fig. 1), located in the hinterland of the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, is a typical alluvial plain characterized by flat and low-lying terrain and a dense distribution of rivers and lakes. The Yangtze River and its tributaries, together with numerous lakes, form a complex and stable water-network system, giving rise to the long-standing landscape pattern of "interwoven land and water with interconnected fields and ponds." This water-centered geographical configuration has not only shaped the organization of agricultural production but also profoundly influenced the site-selection logic of traditional settlements and

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

the spatial form of vernacular dwellings. Confronted with natural conditions of frequent flooding, high humidity, and heavy rainfall, local inhabitants gradually developed building strategies such as raising the plinth, enhancing ventilation, and strengthening drainage through long-term practice, thereby establishing the fundamental environmental logic and technical orientation of traditional residential space. [1]



Fig.1 Geographical Location of the Jianghan Plain

Since the Qin and Han dynasties, the Jianghan Plain has long served as a crucial corridor for cultural exchange between the north and the south of China. The ritual traditions of the Central Plains were continuously inherited here, while Chu culture and water-town culture also permeated the region. Through prolonged interaction, these diverse cultural elements gradually crystallized into a regional style characterized by both stability and inclusiveness [2]. Against this historical backdrop, traditional society was organized around clan structures and agricultural production, with kinship and territorial relations closely intertwined. Social order and everyday life profoundly shaped the spatial organization of architecture. Public or semi-public spaces such as ancestral halls and main halls became core venues for maintaining family relations and ethical norms, endowing the hierarchy of courtyards and room sequences with explicit value orientations. Consequently, residential space was no longer merely a place of dwelling, but a daily setting that carried social relations and cultural identity.

Meanwhile, agrarian civilization further intensified the rhythm of interaction between humans and nature. Rice cultivation, highly sensitive to seasonal and hydrological conditions, led residents to emphasize adaptation to terrain and climate in site selection, orientation, and spatial composition. Productive activities, seasonal festivals, and family rituals unfolded within courtyards and main halls, continuously integrating architectural space into lived practice and gradually forming a vernacular building tradition of “building in accordance with locality and custom.” The arrangement of patios and corridors, as well as the control of building depth and bay width, represented not only technical responses to the natural environment but also reflections of local life experience and value orientation. Therefore, the formation of traditional dwellings in the Jianghan Plain should be understood not as an isolated architectural phenomenon, but as the outcome of long-term interaction between geographical configuration and cultural context.

1.2 Typological Genealogy: Forms and Spatial Prototypes of Traditional Dwellings

Traditional dwellings of the Jianghan Plain do not constitute a single architectural type, but rather a multi-layered typological genealogy formed through long-term historical evolution and regional adaptation. This genealogy reflects both the constraints imposed by the natural environment on architectural form and

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

the continuous shaping of spatial structure by clan institutions, modes of production, and aesthetic concepts. According to spatial organization and structural characteristics, the traditional dwellings of the Jianghan Plain can be broadly classified into three basic prototypes: courtyard-style dwellings, waterside dwellings, and the ancestral hall–residence complex. [3]

First, courtyard-style dwellings constitute the most representative spatial prototype of the Jianghan Plain. Such dwellings are generally organized around one- or two-entry courtyards, presenting a symmetrical axis and a clearly differentiated hierarchy. The main hall is centrally located, with side rooms arranged on both flanks, forming a spatial sequence of "front hall for reception and rear rooms for living," as well as a distinction between inner and outer domains. The main hall serves as the core space, accommodating both everyday living and ritual functions, and acts as an important venue for family activities and social interaction. The courtyard structure not only satisfies residential and productive needs but also expresses ethical order through spatial hierarchy, reflecting the profound continuation of Central Plains ritual culture in the Jianghan region.

Second, waterside dwellings represent a direct response to the water-network environment. In areas characterized by intersecting rivers and surrounding lakes, residents tend to live close to water, developing residential forms with corridors and semi-open spaces. In some localities, quasi-stilted or semi-elevated treatments are adopted, with raised floors, extended eaves, and ventilation openings to cope with humidity and flooding. These dwellings are more flexible and open in spatial organization, with living and productive spaces interpenetrating, vividly embodying the "symbiotic" spatial feature of integrating production and daily life typical of water-town society.

Third, the ancestral hall–residence complex forms the public core of settlements. In villages where clan power is relatively strong, ancestral halls and dwellings often constitute building clusters aligned along a common axis: the ancestral hall occupies a central or prominent position, while surrounding residences are arranged in a concentric or radial pattern, creating a spatial organization bound by kinship. Such complexes not only serve ritual purposes but also function as important venues for deliberation, education, and public activities, vividly reflecting the integrated social structure of "family–clan–village" in the Jianghan Plain.

1.3 Evolutionary Mechanism: Inheritance and Transformation in Historical Continuity

The formation of traditional dwellings in the Jianghan Plain was not a linear process of evolution, but a dynamic system gradually generated through continuous adaptation and accumulation under the constraints of specific natural environments and social structures[4]. From the pre-Qin to the Tang and Song periods, the basic form of these dwellings had already taken shape. Confronted with frequent floods and a hot, humid climate, early inhabitants raised building plinths to prevent waterlogging and moisture, adopted the chuandou timber framework to accommodate soft soil foundations and enhance ventilation, and employed steeply pitched roofs to facilitate rapid drainage. These locally adapted strategies constituted the early technical foundation and laid the framework for subsequent morphological development. Meanwhile, building materials gradually shifted from thatch, bamboo, and timber to brick–timber composite structures, reflecting the continuous improvement of productive capacity and construction techniques.

The Ming and Qing periods marked a critical phase in the maturation of vernacular dwelling forms. With the deepening of regional development and the consolidation of clan institutions, earlier construction tech-

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

niques were fully inherited and integrated with patriarchal ethics, giving rise to courtyard layouts centered on the main hall. During this period, the patio and the "water-returning-to-the-hall" drainage system became increasingly refined, and spatial organization shifted from a primarily functional arrangement to an order imbued with ritual significance. The main hall, together with side rooms arranged according to hierarchical principles, formed a spatial sequence characterized by clear distinctions between inner and outer domains and between seniority and junior status, demonstrating the profound influence of ritual norms on architectural form. Meanwhile, the natural environment continued to act as a regulating force. Adaptive measures—such as raising plinths and adding eaves corridors and open drainage channels, as well as enlarging patios and opening high windows in the outskirts of Jingzhou to improve ventilation—were widely adopted. These adjustments did not disrupt the fundamental courtyard prototype but represented incremental "micro-innovations" within it, reflecting the gradual accumulation of local building knowledge and vernacular wisdom.

After the late Qing and early Republican period, changes in social structure began to affect the functional configuration of dwellings. The expansion of commercial activities led to the emergence of composite forms such as "shop-front with residence behind" and "workshop–courtyard compounds" along the riverfront streets of Shashi, resulting in a gradual weakening of the public role of the main hall and a tendency toward the privatization of living spaces. Nevertheless, the enclosing pattern of the courtyard and the hierarchical spatial sequence were largely preserved, indicating the persistent constraint of cultural inertia on spatial organization. In many cases, although side rooms were converted into storage or workshops, rituals and festival ceremonies continued to be held in the main hall, demonstrating the remarkable continuity of ritual functions. Since modern times, foreign materials such as cement flooring and glass windows have been introduced in a limited manner, mostly as an "additional layer" embedded within the traditional structure, without undermining the overall logic of the chuandou timber framework and patio system. As a result, vernacular dwellings have exhibited a composite condition of "external renewal with internal stability."

2. Cultural Genes in the Spatial Dimension: Layout, Form, and Symbols

2.1 Order of Layout: Courtyard Arrangement and Ethical Space

The spatial layout of traditional dwellings in the Jianghan Plain is not merely a functional organization for living, but a materialized form of social ethics and ritual concepts. As the core prototype, the courtyard layout transforms family structure and social order into a perceptible spatial logic through axial sequences, hierarchical zoning, and distinctions between inner and outer domains [5]□The pattern of a centrally located main hall flanked by side rooms not only meets the needs of daily life but also clearly expresses ethical principles of seniority, hierarchy, and the separation between inside and outside, making space an important medium for maintaining family order.

Within this layout, the main hall occupies the structural core. Located at the most prominent position along the central axis, it accommodates multiple functions such as ancestral worship, family deliberation, reception of guests, and major ceremonies; activities including weddings, funerals, ancestor rites, and welcoming rituals all revolve around this space. Its orientation, scale, and furnishings follow stable ritual conventions—such as placing the ancestral shrine at the center, seating elders in superior positions and guests in subordinate

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

ones—forming a behavioral order that can be repeatedly enacted. Through everyday use, ethical relations are continuously reproduced, turning the building into an "institutionalized field of life."

Corresponding to the main hall, the courtyard constitutes a transitional interface between the household and the community. It serves not only as a place for production and social interaction but also as an extended space for rituals, where festival gatherings and neighborly exchanges commonly take place. The hierarchical progression of "gate–corridor–courtyard–hall" creates a gradient structure from public to private: the gate symbolizes the boundary of the family, the corridor functions as a buffer, the courtyard mediates inner and outer relations, and the main hall concentrates the core order, embodying the constructive logic of "establishing order through ritual."

At the same time, spatial zoning further consolidates social roles and family hierarchy. The inner quarters are generally associated with women and elders, while the outer courtyard and auxiliary rooms tend to serve men and productive activities, forming relatively stable boundaries of use [6]. In the dwellings of Tianmen and Qianjiang, the pattern of elders residing in the main hall and younger generations in side rooms has long been maintained and often preserved even after functional adjustments, demonstrating the persistent constraint of clan ethics on space. Against this background, the order of layout exhibits remarkable stability. In many old houses in Shashi of Jingzhou and Zaoshi of Tianmen, even when certain parts were converted into storage or commercial spaces, the axial alignment of the main hall and the enclosing courtyard relationship were carefully retained; the introduction of modern materials mostly remained at the level of surface renovation without touching the central-axis and hall system. Consequently, the courtyard pattern has transcended practical utility and become a "symbol" carrying family memory and identity.

2.2 Wisdom of Form: Building Construction and Context-Based Adaptation

The form of traditional dwellings in the Jianghan Plain is not a mere technical choice, but the result of long-term responses to the water-network landscape and humid climate, embodying the experiential rationality formed through local practices of production and daily life. The chuandou timber framework constitutes the core structure of this system. Its lightweight components and dispersed load-bearing mechanism facilitate the use of local materials and frequent maintenance, mitigating the erosion caused by moisture while allowing partial replacement after floods or foundation settlement. Many old houses in the Jingzhou area still retain detachable mortise-and-tenon joints, demonstrating the importance of "maintainability" in vernacular construction and reflecting a practical logic that balances durability with flexibility.

Complementing the structural choice, raised plinths, drainage systems, and patio spaces together form the key mechanism of climatic regulation. Courtyards in Longwan of Qianjiang commonly adopt double-level plinths and encircling drains, while old houses in Zaoshi of Tianmen employ brick bases and ventilation holes to reduce dampness. The patio integrates lighting, ventilation, and drainage functions, generating air convection in summer and enabling rapid runoff during the rainy season, while the continuous shadow zones created by eaves and corridors reduce direct solar exposure. The use of materials also reflects a balance between economy and adaptability: blue bricks, grey tiles, and local timber constitute the basic system, and practices such as "brick-wrapped timber" and thick gable walls enhance moisture resistance and durability, enabling buildings to endure under limited resource conditions.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Such formal wisdom is further manifested in the composite organization of production and living. Corridors, side rooms, and courtyard corners simultaneously serve for drying, handicraft work, and storage, forming a "symbiotic" spatial layout that integrates residence with production. This arrangement allows dwellings to flexibly shift roles across different seasons and strengthens their resilience to environmental change. Consequently, vernacular houses of the Jianghan Plain are not enclosed residential units, but functional complexes closely intertwined with agricultural cycles.

2.3 Symbolic Meaning: Decorative Motifs and Symbolic Vocabulary

In traditional dwellings of the Jianghan Plain, decoration is not a subordinate aesthetic embellishment but a visual carrier of cultural meaning. The decorative system composed of brick carving, wood carving, plaster relief, and painting transforms ethical concepts, everyday aspirations, and aesthetic ideals into recognizable visual vocabularies, turning the architectural surface into a cultural text embedded in spatial hierarchy and social order [7] .

Plant motifs constitute the most stable symbolic system. The iconography of the "Four Gentlemen"—plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum—is widely found on door lintels, window lattices, and beams. Their connotations of integrity, virtue, moral uprightness, and reclusion resonate with the value orientation of reverence for culture and ritual in the Jianghan region. In the courtyards of Shashi, Jingzhou, themes such as "bamboo heralds' peace" and "orchids and osmanthus flourish together" are common, expressing ideal expectations of family character while exerting implicit moral education on descendants through daily viewing. In this way, decorative vocabulary participates in the reproduction of ethical order.

Many auspicious images convey more worldly aspirations. Motifs of bats, pomegranates, cranes, and deer respectively signify "blessing," "many offspring," and "longevity." Patterns such as the "five bats presenting longevity" on the door covers of Qianjiang and "abundance year after year" or "joy climbing the brow" on the window lattices of Tianmen create rhythmic visual order through symmetry and repetition, allowing hopes for prosperity and lineage continuity to be stably manifested in space. Symbols like the Eight Trigrams, Ruyi, and lotus seats are often concentrated around the main hall and ancestral shrine, reflecting the integration of Buddhist–Daoist beliefs with folk rituals and corresponding closely to spatial hierarchy, thereby reinforcing the ritual quality of domestic space.

The locality of decorative vocabulary is also embodied in craft language and contexts of use [8]. Honghu tends to favor rounded relief forms, while Jingzhou commonly combines line engraving with openwork; these patterns are continually replicated and adjusted through master–apprentice transmission, transforming into collective aesthetic memory. Moreover, the same motif may carry different meanings in different spaces: bamboo on a door lintel symbolizes family integrity, whereas in a study it refers to literati cultivation; pomegranate emphasizes fertility in wedding settings but implies the continuity of incense in ancestral rites. Symbolic meaning is thus renewed through ongoing acts of "translation," forming an open yet stable network of meanings.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

3. Cultural Genes in the Dimension of Cultural Context: Ritual, Folk Practice, and Spiritual Meaning

3.1 Ritual Ethics: Residential Order and Clan Norms

The spatial organization of traditional dwellings in the Jianghan Plain is deeply embedded in the system of ritual ethics; residential order is not merely a functional arrangement but a materialized expression of clan norms and social relations. By regulating spatial position, modes of use, and behavioral boundaries, ritual transforms abstract ethical concepts into perceptible and operable patterns of everyday life, making the dwelling a daily carrier of social structure.

The shaping of residential order by ritual is first manifested in behavioral procedures. Major events such as ancestor worship, weddings, birthday celebrations, and funerals all revolve around the main hall, where movement, positioning, and speech follow established conventions, turning space into an "institutionalized stage." In the old houses of Zaoshi, Tianmen, wedding ceremonies still follow the sequence of "welcoming the bride—paying homage in the hall—respecting the ancestors—banqueting," with family members taking their places according to generation and gender, demonstrating the persistent constraint of ritual on spatial use. Rituals are not occasional events; through periodic repetition, they internalize family history and values into embodied memory. Clan norms further maintain order through everyday interaction, as forms of address between generations, dining precedence, guest etiquette, and division of household labor correspond closely to spatial usage, forming stable behavioral boundaries.

Ritual ethics are also consolidated through symbols of authority. The arrangement of ancestral tablets, genealogies, and ritual utensils is not static decoration but a symbolic resource that mediates family decisions and disputes. In some villages of Jingzhou, matters such as household division, house construction, and marriage arrangements are still ultimately determined by elders deliberating in the main hall, revealing the close linkage between space and power discourse. Even after the decline of formal clan institutions, this symbolic authority has continued in the form of customs, exerting implicit influence on residential order. In modern times, with changes in family size and occupational structure, certain ritual functions have weakened, yet their core logic has not disappeared. The main hall has shifted from a center of sacrifice to a space for reception and discussion, and side rooms have assumed new living functions while still retaining symbolic references to generational hierarchy.

3.2 Folk Practices: Festive Rituals and Everyday Customs

Festive rituals and everyday customs constitute a crucial bond connecting architecture and society, enabling vernacular dwellings to acquire renewed meaning through repeated use. The rhythm of the year, centered on the agricultural calendar, structures important activities within the house during festivals such as the Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Winter Solstice. During the Spring Festival, the main hall is decorated with ancestral tablets and New Year prints and becomes the center for ancestor worship and greetings; during the Dragon Boat Festival, mugwort is hung in the courtyard and incense tables are arranged to ward off epidemics. Spatial functions thus shift with the seasons, giving architecture the feature of "periodic re-contextualization." Field investigations in Qianjiang and Xiantao show that

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

many families still perform the ritual of "welcoming the ancestors back to the hall" on New Year's Eve, temporarily restoring the traditional sacred quality of the main hall.

Wedding and funeral customs further strengthen the ritual dimension of space. The wedding sequence of "welcoming the bride—paying homage in the hall—entering the bridal chamber" unfolds through the courtyard and main hall, while funerals construct a spatial narrative through the arrangement of the mourning hall and the route of the funeral procession. In Tianmen, red silk is hung at the courtyard gate, and a worship position is set in the hall during weddings, with guest movements strictly following hierarchical order; in some villages of Jingzhou, the custom of "circling the house three times" at funerals is still preserved, symbolizing farewell to the ancestral home. Ritual thus transforms architecture into a social theater in which individual identities are confirmed and reconstructed through spatial action.

Everyday habits determine the micro-organization of space. Patterns of dining, labor, and neighborly interaction shape the rhythm of domestic life: eaves corridors and courtyard corners are used for drying grain, weaving, and handicraft work; kitchens and wells become nodes of women's social interaction; the open space in front of the gate serves as a place for children's play and neighborhood conversation. Many dwellings display stable "work routes," leaving the house through side doors at dawn to the fields and returning at dusk to handle farm tools in the courtyard. At the same time, beliefs and taboos are embedded in architectural details—rules such as "the door should not face the stove" and "the bed should not be placed under a beam" are widely observed, while practices like the beam-raising ceremony, posting door gods, and placing New Year money bind notions of fortune and misfortune to spatial nodes, forming implicit behavioral norms.

3.3 Craftsmanship: Building Wisdom and Artisan Transmission

The long-term continuity of space and form in traditional dwellings of the Jianghan Plain relies on the "implicit support" of craftsmanship. Building wisdom is not an abstract idea but continuously materialized through the coordinated practices of carpentry, masonry, tiling, and decorative crafts. Techniques such as mortise-and-tenon joints in the chuandou timber frame, control of eave curvature, brick joint pointing, and the proportioning of plaster relief all depend on operational norms transmitted orally and experientially. Senior craftsmen often rely on pattern books and on-site layout, determining dimensions through traditional units like "step, chi, and fen" combined with bodily experience, forming local techniques distinct from standardized drawings. Such experiential knowledge is closely related to environmental conditions and functions as a technical carrier of regional adaptation.

Craft activities are deeply intertwined with the structure of rural society. Construction is usually organized based on families or villages, where master–apprentice relations largely overlap with clan ties, and carpenters, masons, and tilers cooperate within temporary work teams following stable procedural rhythms. In Longwan of Qianjiang, customs such as the "beam-raising banquet" and the "master-thanking rite" are still preserved, showing that craftsmanship possesses both economic and ritual attributes. Craftsmen are not only technical executors but also practitioners of ritual and taboo; the selection of auspicious dates and the determination of door orientation and beam position reflect the interweaving of knowledge, belief, and social relations.

The transmission of skills relies primarily on practical contexts rather than textual norms. Apprentices acquire the handling of joints and proportioning through participation in repair and new construction, forming a

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

learning path of "learning by doing." Many techniques—such as the slight tapering of timber members or the fine adjustment of roof curvature—are difficult to articulate verbally and depend on embodied memory and experiential judgment. This mode of transmission ensures flexibility while making the craft highly dependent on individual artisans. At the same time, craftsmanship embodies ecological and economic rationality: components are detachable and reusable, materials are recycled, and construction proceeds in stages. In the renovation of old houses, "old materials used anew" is common, with beams, columns, bricks, and tiles repeatedly regenerated, endowing buildings with a "growable" capacity for gradual adjustment.

3.4 Spiritual Symbolism: Clan Memory and Cultural Identity

Clan memory, local beliefs, and emotional experience converge in space, enabling architecture to transcend practical function and become an important medium for sustaining cultural identity. Spiritual symbolism is not an abstract idea but is continually activated through spatial positioning, ritual practice, and the arrangement of material objects. [9]

Clan memory acquires visible form in space. The main hall, ancestral hall, and ancestral tablets constitute the core nodes of memory, while genealogies, plaques, and couplets translate family history into visual symbols. In many households, door lintels bear inscriptions such as "a family that accumulates virtue" or "cultivating and studying as family tradition," which serve both as family precepts and as spiritual calls to descendants. In Tianmen, old beams and columns are deliberately preserved during renovation to maintain the "presence of the ancestors," indicating that objects themselves have become carriers of memory. Architecture thus assumes the role of a "container of time," allowing individuals to encounter family history repeatedly in everyday life.

Belief systems further endow space with sacredness. Ancestor worship and folk religion have long coexisted, and ancestral shrines, earth-god niches, and door-god images together construct a spiritual protective network. In villages of Qianjiang, during worship on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month, family members enter the main hall to perform rites, temporarily elevating the space into a sacred domain. Belief is not separated from daily life but embedded in residential rhythms, enabling the dwelling to maintain a flexible boundary between the secular and the sacred.

Emotional experience shapes a deeper sense of local belonging. The courtyard witnesses growth, marriage, and separation, becoming an anchor of affective memory. Many migrant workers insist on "returning to the old house for the New Year"; even when new residences offer better conditions, the ancestral home is still regarded as the spiritual origin and is often called the "root house," symbolizing identity and emotional security. With changes in family structure, some rituals have been simplified, yet their symbolic orientation has not disappeared: after the main hall is converted into a living room, a corner for ancestor worship is still retained, and activities once held in the ancestral hall may shift to community spaces, demonstrating a "relocation of symbolic function."

4. Conclusion

The cultural characteristics of traditional dwellings in the Jianghan Plain do not originate from a single

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

factor but are gradually generated through the long-term coupling of natural environment and human traditions. The study indicates that these characteristics are mainly manifested through two interwoven dimensions— "spatial organization" and "cultural context." At the spatial level, the dwelling form centered on an axial-symmetric layout and the "one-bright–two-dark" main hall structure not only embodies the regulation of residential order by patriarchal ritual but also internally responds to the production mode and life rhythm in which fishing and farming coexist. At the cultural level, as the material carrier of clan identity and local spirit, vernacular dwellings continuously transmit regional historical memory and values through ritual practices, everyday use, and symbolic systems. Therefore, traditional dwellings of the Jianghan Plain should not be regarded as static architectural relics, but as a cultural system that is constantly activated within the interplay of space, institutions, and lived practices. However, in the context of rapidly transforming production structures and increasing social uncertainty, this cultural system faces the risk of systemic rupture. On the one hand, large-scale demolition and spatial restructuring have damaged the material carriers of traditional dwellings; on the other hand, insufficient conservation awareness and the decline of traditional craftsmanship have continually weakened the practical foundation on which cultural genes depend, leading to the gradual loss of their intrinsic cultural meanings. Consequently, the preservation of vernacular dwellings can no longer remain confined to mere morphological restoration but must move toward systemic reconstruction that establishes organic linkages among spatial rehabilitation, craft transmission, and cultural revitalization. This requires not only undertaking rescue repairs guided by the principle of authenticity but also promoting the contemporary translation and regeneration of building skills, and further rebuilding networks of human–space relations through clan rituals and cultural communication [10]. Only with multi-stakeholder collaboration and long-term institutional support can the cultural genes of Jianghan Plain dwellings achieve sustainable and high-quality continuity and renewal in the contemporary context.

Funding

This paper is the phased achievement of the research project of Jingchu Institute of Technology Research Fund Project, A Study on the Cultural Genes and Cultural Governance of Traditional Architecture in the Jianghan Plain*(*SKZX2501).

References

[1] Wang Xu, Ma Bowen, Li Dan, et al. Multi-scenario simulation and prediction of ecological space[J]. Journal of Natural Resources, 2020, 35(01): 230-242.

[2] Zhang Lianggao. Vernacular Dwellings of Hubei [M]. Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press, 2008: 47–51.

[3] Xia Jin, Zhou Haoming. Investigation and Analysis on Ecological Adaptive Construction of Traditional Dwellings in Southern Hubei—A Case Study of Baoshi Village, the "First Ancient Vernacular Settlement of Chutian" [J]. Yangtze River Economy, 2018(10): 60–62.

[4] Sun Xuguang. Construction of Cultural Gene Map of Traditional Dwellings and Its Protection and Inheritance Path—A Case Study of Central Anhui Courtyard Houses [J]. Journal of Fuyang Normal University (Social Sciences Edition), 2025(1): 25–27.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

[5] Wang Liang. Research on Settlement Pattern, Construction Mechanism and Ecological Wisdom of Dike-Embankment Settlements in the Jianghan Plain—A Case Study of Tian–Qian–Mian Area [J]. South Architecture, 2025(7): 38–41.
[6] Winarni S. Comparative Understanding of Traditional Architecture based on Literature Review: Refining the Definition of Traditional Architecture[J]. International Journal of Architecture and Urbanism, 2021, 5(3): 252-262.
[7] Samalavičius A L, Traškinaitė D. Traditional vernacular buildings, architectural heritage and sustainability[J]. 2021.
[8] Vuksanović-Macura Z, Ljubenov G, Gajić T. Preservation of Vernacular Cultural Landscape and Sustainable Tourism: A Case Study from the Western Carpatho-Balkan Region[J]. Heritage, 2025, 8(12): 493.
[9] Raudonikyte I, Grazuleviciute-Vileniske I. Tacit Sustainability in the Countryside: Cultural and Ecological Layers of Lithuanian Heritage Homestead[J]. Land, 2025, 14(9): 1910.
[10] Wei Cheng, Bao Jigang, Cheng Yeqing, et al. Protection, Renewal and Revitalization of Traditional Villages in the New Era: Institutional Innovation, Governance Coordination and Technological Empowerment [J]. Journal of Natural Resources, 2025: 1–30.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)