Research on the Artistic Aesthetics of the Ancient Residential Building in Jiangtou Village

2021, Vol.2 No.10
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DOI: 10.37420/j.adr.2021.042
https://masonpublish.org

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Abstract
With a history of more than one thousand years, the ancient dwellings in Jiangtou Village accumulate a heavy cultural foundation. This paper mainly introduces the artistic aesthetics of the ancient dwellings in Jiangtou Village through two aspects including the design feature and artistic characteristics and briefly analyzes the architectural art of the buildings.

Keywords
Jiangtou village; Ancient dwellings; Architectural art

The ancient dwellings in Jiangtou Village have a history of more than one thousand years. There are more than 180 buildings of Ming and Qing Dynasties, which are distributed regularly (Li, 2016). Most of the villagers' surnamed is Zhou for they are the descendants of famous thinker, writer and politician Zhou Dunyi. With its long history, splendid cultural heritage and abundant building samples, the historical and cultural value of the village is undoubtable.

Architectural Design Elements of Jiangtou Village

The ancient buildings in Jiangtou Village are of wide variety. Besides those typical ancient buildings including ancient dwellings, streets, bridges, tablets, pavilions and towers, an ancestral hall could also be found here. The external structure of the buildings here are greatly influenced by ancient architecture school of Hui. To some extent, it embodies a mix of the main characteristics of southern folk dwelling and unique characteristics of itself. The ancient buildings in the village are endowed with the profound historical and cultural conception, which comes from the neo-Confucianism thought of Zhou Dunyi and has great artistic value.

Decorative Elements in Ailian Ancestral Hall

Ailian Ancestral Hall (Figure 1) is a public space open to all members of the Zhou clan and acts as a gathering place for family members to meet and talk. The hall also leaves a psychological space for the intersection of common belief of Zhou clan (Figure 2). The imperial examination is the only way to realize personal life values in the Ming and Qing dynasties. To make a long lasting and prosperous family, one clan need put education as a priority, thus the family member can receive good education and have enough ability to compete in the imperial examination. After becoming an official, one can shoulder the mission of supporting a prosperous family. Given this, the Jiangtou Village formed an atmosphere of respecting knowledge and admiring teachers. That physical atmosphere is also reflected on architecture. Many decorative details in the Ailian Ancestral Hall are themed on "understanding", "virtue", "Confucianism" and "encourage learning". Those decorative elements affecting the Zhou clan members since they were children. Their views to world, life and value will be subtly influenced as they grew up. Undoubtedly, the decorative context in the Ailian Ancestral Hall acts a positive role for the education of future generations and provides a spiritual bailment for expressing the good wish that their descendant can be good at Confucianism, carry forward Neo-Confucianism and assist the emperor just like their ancestor.



Figure 1. Ailian Ancestral hall



Figure 2. The private academy in the ancestral hall

Windows with Caved Patterns

There are more than 50 panes in Ailian Ancestral Hall, most of which are decorated with seal characters that made of wooden slats (Figure 3). These carved patterns on the window not only have aesthetic value, but also have ventilation function and transparent to light (Huang, 2016). The words on the panes are come from *The Analects of Confucius, Mencius* and other Confucian classics, such as "containment", which means stop unhealthy practices, and maintain social order upright; "meet sages", which teaches the clan members be near to people of virtue and take them as role models for be a sage one day; "be sensitive to things", which indicates reason of be cautious with one's words and deeds, and warns the younger generation not to use big words but to be very diligent on

practice; “the philosophy of the old and the young” comes from one of the great Confucian classic *Mencius*. “Expend the respect of the elder in one’s family to that of other families; expend the love of the young ones in one’s family to that of other families.” This word advocates the idea of benevolence, and educates the younger generation to respect the elder and love the young. “Cultivating morality and understanding ethic” is the core of Neo-Confucianism as well as the core value of residents in Jiangtou Village for hundreds of years (Chen, 2019). Those works have enlightened the people of Zhou clan generations of generations.



Figure 3. Windows of the courtyard inside the ancestral hall

Stone Cavings

Compared with wood, stone has better performance in resisting weathering and moisture erosion. Given this, load-bearing volumes and moisture-proof parts are generally made of stone to ensure the stability of construction as a whole in the traditional architecture. Meanwhile, some of the stone pillars are carved with decorative pattern for aesthetic function. This kind of artistic form is stone carving. Stone carvings are wildly starring in the ancestral Hall and are mainly applied in pillar base and the drum-stone. Due to the moist climate of the north Guangxi Autonomous region, wooden structure is hard to be preserved. This area is also rich in bluestone, which provides material basis for the development of carving skills.

Wood Carving

Wood carving decoration, as the name implies, is a carving with timber as its carrier. The relatively soft texture of wood neutralizing the cold and rigid architectural image of the black bricks and black tiles of The Ailian Ancestral hall, making the building more harmonious. All of the wood carvings follow a common principle, that is, “the content must demonstrate something of auspicious”. In the Ailian Ancestral Hall, the wood carvings are mainly applied on the sparrow braces and support beams, and some of the lotus-shaped columns that play an ornament role. For lotus-shaped columns and support beams play a role of supporting, the carvings on those two parts are mostly using re-

lievo and line engraving. The openwork carvings are applied on the sparrow braces for enhancing the sense of space (Liu, 2012). Flowers, plants and geometric shapes are the major subjects of those carvings. With the continuous repetition pattern organization method, the order and proportion of the patterns can be well organized.

The sparrow braces are mainly emplaced on the conjunctions of lotus-shaped columns and support beams for reducing the downward shearing force caused by this two parts. Most of the wood carvings in the Ailian Ancestral hall are themed on auspicious omen, hero worship and encouraging learning such as sparrow brace with pines, cloud and deers with ganoderma lucidum in their mouth, which mean something good is about to happen. A herd of deers are chasing with each other, which implies the competition on the imperial examination court and officialdom. Some carvings on the sparrow braces are about Chi dragon which symbolizes power and counteracting evil force in Chinese culture. Some of braces are engraved with the flying phoenix, peonies and the rising sun, which symbolize talents will meet the gracious emperor. Some braces are engraved with pattern that a Chinese dragon is flying in fog clouds, that is a famous image “flying dragon in the sky”. That title is a metaphor of success, Large number of people come forth to enroll into the official. With its exquisite patterns, rich content and vivid modeling, the wood carvings in Ailan Ancestral Hall has a great aesthetic value.

The Firewall

The firewalls of the three courtyards is different from each other. The gable of the Damen Building has a shape of pot ear with soft curve and large range. It is built in imitation of an ancient official hat, which indicates a bright future. Xingzong gate is a firewall with two steps while the Wenyuan building is three. The turn of each step is shaped in magpie tail, which is often used to express scholars’ expectation of showing their aspirations of becoming officials. The rising steps on the firewalls layer by layer also have the meaning of political promotion.

Both two-step firewalls and three-step firewalls in the Ailan Ancestral Hall are made up with eaves, roofs and brick eaves. The most elegant part of the firewall is the conjunction area of eave and wall. The building of the conjunction needs two steps, first, filling the wide gap between eave and wall with bricks and cement; second, plaster the seam into even surface. Those firewalls which are made of rammed earth are extremely vivid with its special texture.

Ornamental Engraving

The ornamental engravings in the dwellings are of delicate and beautiful. The village is given title of “the best village of ornamental engraving in central and southern China”, which shows that the engraving technology in this village achieved a certain level of autistics status. The ornamental

engravings are mainly applied on the doors, Windows, partition screens, sparrow braces and other decorative components. Over the years the people of Jiangtou village are in harmonious with the nature, thus there are many ornamental engravings with natural elements, such as plum, peony and fruits which implies auspicious in traditional Chinese culture; Chinese dragon, phoenix, kirin, deer and magpie are also the common elements. Those elements can form a variety of topics such as: "safe all year round" with four kinds of flowers of different seasons as the topic; "magpies on the tree tops" that means something of great pleasure are going to happen; "flying dragon and hovering phoenix"; " cranes and pine" that implies longevity; "fire-red phoenix dancing towards the morning sun"; and "blooming flowers" that indicates rich and prosperity, etc. The craftsmen of Jiangtou village are skilled in carving and rich in imagination. Different ornamental engravings have different meanings, and they are all expressing the villagers' pursuit of auspicious omen. Good spiritual wishes such as warding off evil, extending their lives, pursuing peace and good luck are going through the whole process of development of this village.

Hulong Bridge and Zichu Tower

Hulong Bridge (Figure 4) is located in the southeast of The Ailian Ancestral hall. It is an open arched single-hole stone bridge with a history of more than two hundred years. On the east side of the bridge is the Zichu Tower and on the west side is a stone tablet. Hulong Bridge was built at the expense of an official of the seventh grade of Qing dynasty. The number upward stair is four and of the downward is seven. The number four represents that he obtained the position of the seventh grade after serving as an official.The distance between the arch of the bridge and the water is 4 meters, which reminds him that only when he become an official of honest and fair can he achieve lofty aim as his wishes.

The five-story high Zichu tower (Figure 5) has four corners on each story. Brick arch window, reversed bow-shape eave, upright wing angle and brass bell on four corners can be seen on each layer (Liang, 2006). The tower body is decorated with reliefs and colored drawings and is in harmony with the architecture complex of the village .



Figure 4. Hulong Bridge



Figure 5. Zichu Tower

Summary

The decorative style of the ancient residential buildings in Jiangtou Village is characterized by simple, modesty and rusticity, which are shared by the residential buildings in Northern Guangxi Autonomous Region. The decorative elements of the village are unique and is worth to be studied (Xie, 2013; Sun & Jiang, 2013). The internal and external structure of the ancient buildings in Jiangtou Village together with the cultural background created the unique atmosphere of this place— hardly a village can be home to so many officials in the era of imperial examination, that is a miracle. Every piece of exquisite carving on the wall, window or sparrow brace is demonstrating the folk artisans' marvelous skill. Every piece of sculpture can be viewed as the treasure of the production technology. These exquisite decorative elements not only reflect the profound culture background of Jiangtou Village, but also extend the unique artistic aesthetic value of the carving skills (Ren, 2013).

The Architectural Art Features of the Ancient Dwellings in Jiangtou Village

The Layout and Architectural Features of Ailian Ancestral Hall

The architecture of the Ailian Ancestral Hall is the result of the spread of typical Han culture to Lingnan area. It keeps the basic construction technology and style of the traditional compound courtyard of the Han nationality in the Central Plains: the quadrangle structure of the compound courtyard surrounded by four walls. According to Mr. Zhou Sixiong, a member of the Zhou family, Ailian Ancestral Hall was originally a structure with five rooms width and six rooms depth, covering an area of 1200 square meters. It changed into the pattern of three rooms width and five rooms depth as we see now in the cultural revolution era. The Palace of Ancestors, the Fengyu Pavilion and the Xiexi Pavilion were destroyed during that era. It is a great pity not to see the magnificent appearance of formal Ailian Ancestral Hall.

Ailian Ancestral Hall is a symmetrical wooden structure building, with the central axis running through the hall (Zhou, 2011). The preserved Ailian Ancestral hall is divided into three parts: The Damen building, the Xingzong gate and the Wenyuan Building.

Color Elements

People's perception of color is endless. When we observe an object with our most intuitive vision, the brain will perceive that the eye first sees the color of the object, and then the shape and material, so color is the first element caught by human eye. The buildings in Jiangtou village are mainly

colored in red, gray and black. Red represents the lotus flower, symbolizing happiness and well-being. While black represents the mud, symbolizing the lotus flower rising out of the mud without staining. This reflects the aesthetic perception of the villagers in Jiangtou village and their ability of using color. The walls of the buildings in Jiangtou village are made of bluestone bricks, which will change their color in different weather conditions. The people in the village believe that the special raw material of the bluestone brick is a gift of nature.

Building Materials

The buildings in Jiangtou village are made of natural, environmental friend and sustainable materials: cobblestone of streets and alleys; Black brick and tile of houses; Bluestone for Bridges, towers, steles and memorial archways, as well as the decorative parts such as sparrow braces and drum-stone, are all made of wood and stone materials. Wood, stone, brick and tile are the four basic building elements of Jiangtou Village. In fact, in the entire construction process of Jiangtou Village, the local villagers always follow the principle of using local materials, and make good use of the surrounding natural environment to create their own dwelling style. Abundant rainfall along with suitable temperature in the North Guangxi Autonomous Region creates a lush forest for Jiangtou Village, a flourish timber bank. Cobblestone covered around the bank of the river and rich-preserved raw material of bluestone provide high quality stone material for Jiangtou Village. Those materials are easy to access and having the advantages of low production cost, high plasticity, easy to process and accord to surrounding environment. The ecological natural materials are conforming to local people's natural aesthetic demand.

Spatial Elements

The walls of the buildings in Jiangtou Village are very tall, the firewalls especially. The roadway in Jiangtou Village are featured in narrow and long. For the wall is high and the roadway is narrow, the sun cannot shine on the roadway in most time of a day. Following the upward extension of both sides of the wall, one can only see the sky. The roadways are parallel to the sky and the walls on both sides constitute two skyline. Walking in the picturesque cobblestone roadway, one can enjoy the full beautiful scenery view of this village (Hou, 2019).

Conclusion

To sum up, the ancient building complex of Jiangtou Village in Guilin is the crystallization of the wisdom of the generations of Zhou clan. They created a unique building style that adapt to the harmonious development with natural environment under the influence of the neo-Confucianism. Through the study of the architectural art and aesthetic thoughts of Jiangtou Village, we rethink the

traditional architectural culture of this village and appreciate the beauty of architecture in many aspects. Designers today can learn from the ancient architecture philosophy and apply the essences of our ancestors to creat a more suitable living environment for modern people.

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