

Study on the artistic characteristics of the architectural decoration of the Wu Family Temple in Hong'an

Zihao Xiong

Ph.D, Candidate, Doctor of Philosophy Program in Arts Performance Communication, Shinawatra University, 745316543@qq.com

Sakon Phu-ngamdee

Assoc. Prof. Dr., School of Liberal Arts, Shinawatra University, sakon.p@mru.ac.th

Abstract

This Article aimed to study the artistic characteristics of the architectural decoration of the Wu Family Temple in Hong'an.

The sample was located in Hong'an County, Huanggang City, Hubei Province, China, the ancient architecture of the Wu Family Temple. Data collection is mainly from site visits and literature research. The research results were found as follows;

Features of architectural decorative patterns of the Wu Family Temple

1. The ridge line is decorated in the form of flower roof tiles with additional translucent carved dragon patterns.
2. The walls of the hill are carved with a sense of rising and falling.
3. The roof tiles are beautifully carved.
4. The doorway is richly decorated with different shapes of ventilation holes.
5. The auspicious patterns of the partition doors and windows are varied and highly decorative.

Features of architectural decorative art of Wu Family Temple

- 1 Symbiosis of structure and decoration.
- 2 Coexistence of mortal and divine beings
- 3 Praying for good fortune and warding off evil together

Keywords: *Hong'an Wu Family Temple; Architectural decoration; Artistic features.*

INTRODUCTION

As the globalization process of the world continues, the cultural identity of each nation is gradually blurred, and the convergence of cultures and the loss of their own regional

architectural and urban characteristics. The local culture with its own characteristics is gradually swallowed up, and how to continue and develop the traditional regional architectural culture has become a common concern.

Liang Sicheng (1947) wrote in *Why Study Chinese Architecture*: "A city in an old oriental country that has completely lost its own artistic identity in architecture is a great source of sorrow in terms of cultural expression and outlook. For this fact clearly represents the decline of our culture, leading to the elimination of the phenomenon."

In the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics, ancient buildings are defined as immovable cultural relics and are under state protection (China Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 1982). Since 1961, the China National Cultural Heritage Administration (1961-2019) has published eight batches of Major Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the National Level, totaling 5,058. Among them, there are a total of 2160 ancient buildings, accounting for about 43%. With the attention and guidance of the Chinese government, the conservation and study of traditional architectural remains have received more and more general attention from the academic community.

Among the major historical and cultural site protected at the national level, there are 59 ancient buildings in the ancestral hall category, accounting for only about 2.7% of the ancient buildings category and 1.2% of the total number. Hubei Province has also announced eight batches of 920 the major historical and cultural site protected at the provincial level since 1961, of which 44 are ancestral halls, accounting for only 4.8%.

Fig.1. the Six Central Provinces GDP of China of 2022

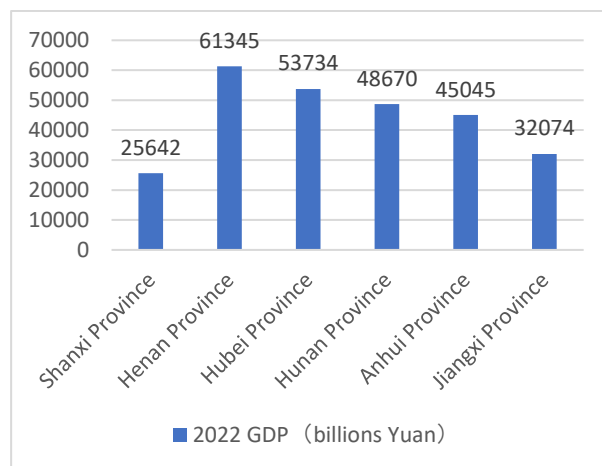
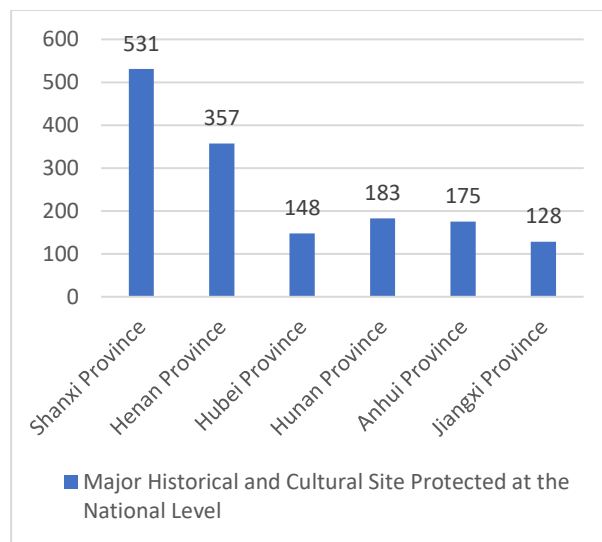


Fig.2. the major historical and cultural site protected at the national level of the Six Central Provinces of China



In the *Opinions on Promoting the Rise of the Central Region*, the scope of the "Central Region" is officially defined as six provinces, including Shanxi, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Anhui, and Jiangxi (China Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2006). In Table 1., Hubei Province has the second highest GDP in the central region. In Table 1. Hubei Province ranks fifth in the major historical and

cultural site protected at the national level, with only 20 more than Jiangxi. Compared to its developed economy, Hubei Province has great room for improvement in terms of cultural heritage conservation.

Ancestral hall is a special form of traditional Chinese architecture, and its architectural decoration is an excellent historical and cultural resource, evolving and inheriting in the process of historical evolution, and carrying excellent traditional Chinese culture, which is a physical manifestation of Chinese ancestor worship tradition and clan culture. The Wu Family Temple in Hong'an is a typical representative of traditional architecture in Hubei Province, with a history of more than 200 years and a grand architectural scale and exquisite architectural decoration, which has a high artistic and historical value. However, although the Wu Family Temple has been renovated many times, it is still very cold, and there is a lack of research on the architectural decoration of Wu Family Temple, which is a case of ancient architecture worthy of preservation and in-depth study in Hubei Province.

Research Objectives

1. To study the changes of the clan culture and folk culture behind the Wu Family Temple, to summarize the development trajectory of the ancestral hall culture and the regional characteristics of the folk culture of the ancestral hall in Northeast China, and to find the inner connection between the development of the ancestral hall and the clan culture.

2. Based on the research on the architectural decoration of the Wu clan ancestors, we summarize the categories, characteristics and commonalities of the traditional decoration of the ancestral halls, study the spatial form of the clan ancestors, summarize the characteristics of the location and spatial layout of the clan

ancestors, and seek the interaction between the architecture and the clan culture.

3. Through the analysis and study of architectural forms and decorative arts, based on the study of appearances, the architectural decoration is raised to the level of art, linked to the clan culture, and the cultural connotation and spiritual concept behind the decoration of traditional residential houses is further explored.

Literature Review

Architectural decoration is an aesthetic object on the surface of a building (Fuxi Shen, Hongming Shen, 2001). Architectural decoration is an architectural visual object, which is multi-functional, not only for aesthetic purposes, but also for national, regional religious, ethical, customary, mental and emotional imagery and many other functions. Or rather, its semantic meaning is multi-layered. The decoration in a building reflects its essential characteristics in a comprehensive way.

The three conceptual categories of architectural decoration one-by-one imitation decoration, additional decoration, and organic decoration actually point out the three levels of architectural decoration, namely meaning, aesthetic and practical. In this paper, according to the progressive relationship of the three levels of architectural decoration, the hierarchical structure of architectural decoration is summarized as practical demand, aesthetic expression, and meaning bearing (Ying Xue, 2012):

1. Practical needs. Whether it is traditional Chinese architecture or Western classical architecture, from the origin of human architecture of the two building types - nesting and cave dwelling, the origin of the building is

the human habitat according to the actual situation of climate, geography, materials and make different choices. This is the choice out of practical needs, is the survival of human life is the fundamental guarantee, practical needs for the first element of human construction activities, it is with human life, other levels of needs are further developed on the basis of this.

The art of architectural decoration and the art of architecture can be regarded as emerging at the same time, and the creation of architectural decoration cannot be separated from the practical needs of structure and materials. The occurrence of architectural decoration is, first of all, the beautification of the structure and structure by which the architectural space exists. It is also because this decoration is combined with the components and parts with utilitarian value that people feel its beauty more. It is the basic principle of architectural decoration to highlight the characteristics of the texture and color of building materials and the rationality of their utilization; to highlight the mechanical characteristics and skillfulness of the structure construction; to highlight the functional characteristics of the components and the sense of practical efficiency and other beautification processing (Fuxi Shen & Hongming Shen, 2002).

2. Aesthetic expression. Architectural decoration not only has practical properties, but also has spiritual properties. The spiritual properties of architectural decoration are expressed in many aspects, and aesthetics is one of them. Aesthetic activity is a special kind of human activity, which is based on and motivated by the spiritual needs of man. The spiritual needs of man are the intrinsic and essential prescriptive nature of mankind, which is the instinctive needs of mankind.

"Food must always be full, and then seek beauty; clothing must always be warm, and then seek beauty; living must always be safe, and then seek happiness." (Xiang Liu, 17 BC) "Seeking beauty", "seeking beauty", and "seeking happiness" refers to the aesthetic needs of human beings on the basis of satisfying the material needs of survival. Among Maslow's five levels of needs, aesthetic needs are the high level of emotional needs (Maslow, 1943).

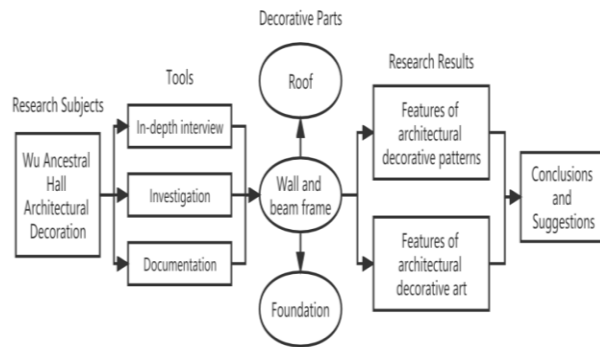
3. Meaning-bearing. The existence of architectural decoration may be for practical reasons or aesthetic reasons, but practicality and aesthetics are not the only reasons and the deepest reasons. The carrying of meaning is a spiritual attribute of architectural decoration, which reveals the essence of architectural decoration more than the practical need and aesthetic expression. Whether it is Chinese or Western architectural decoration, the bearing of meaning is the deepest and most core level.

Chinese traditional architectural decoration also focuses on the expression of meaning and has significant symbolic significance. As a kind of decorative pattern, auspicious pattern is a common theme pattern of traditional Chinese architectural decoration, which not only focuses on the formal beauty of the pattern, but also the meaningful beauty of the pattern, and expresses its inner meaning through various artistic expressions such as symbolism, allegory, harmony, analogy, grouping, table number and text (Ying Xue, 2012).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study is shown in Fig.1.

Fig.1. Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

The data in this study are divided into primary and secondary data. Primary data will be obtained by interviews, surveys, and mapping, while secondary data will be obtained from past literature or past research on the research subjects, and both online and offline sources will be used. Such as journals, writings, newspapers, etc., as well as local genealogies, inscriptions, couplets in ancestral buildings, etc. of the research subjects.

1. In-depth interview. Individual interviews, which refer to the interview activities conducted by the investigator with the respondents individually, have the advantages of strong confidentiality, flexible interview format, accurate survey results, and high return rate of interview forms.

A large number of interviews will be conducted in this study. Through interviews with village elders, we will learn about the origin and

changes of the family, the history and changes of the ancestral halls, the origin of the craftsmen, the construction methods, and so on, and put ourselves in their shoes to understand the vicissitudes of the history of the ancestral halls.

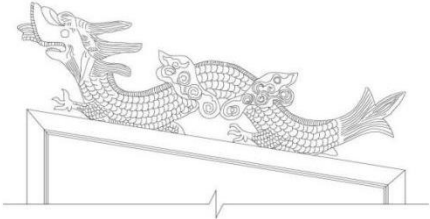
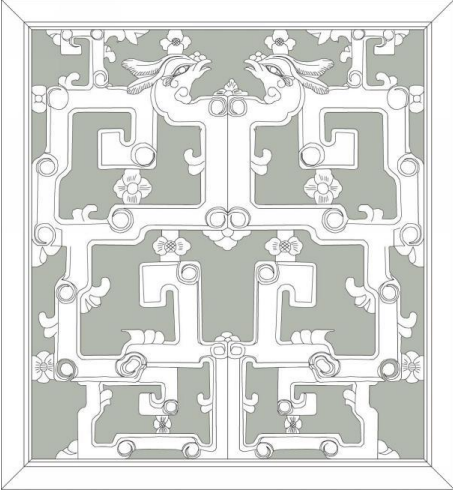

2. Investigation. Through field investigation and filming, first-hand information is obtained through research. This includes photography, videography, image production, and drawing and processing.


3. Documentation. Collect a lot of relevant documents, such as county records, village records, genealogies and other ancient books. Read books, papers, journals, etc. related to traditional residential decoration. On this basis, analyze and organize the required information to provide basic information and theoretical basis for the research of the subject.

Research Results

In the long history of development, the traditional Chinese architectural decoration highlights the production mode, lifestyle, geographic environment, natural conditions, cultural traditions and philosophical ethics of the Chinese nation, as well as the national psychological qualities and folk customs that have been accumulated and frozen over a long period of time, influencing and governing the artistic spirit of ancient Chinese history and culture and its unique conceptual system.

Table 1 Architectural decoration characteristics and cultural connotation of Hong'an Wu Family Temple

Decorative features	Decorative motifs	Examples of decoration	Examples of decorative motifs
1. Symbiosis between structure and decoration 2. Mundane and divine coexist 3. Blessing and warding off evil together	Precious and auspicious monsters (Chinese: 珍禽瑞兽)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Kylin•Phoenix•Dragon•Lion•Bat•Butterfly	
	Auspicious ornaments (Chinese: 吉祥纹饰)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Curly grass pattern•Curling pattern•Ruyi pattern•Dark eight fairy pattern	
	Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Longevity•Swastika•The family inherited the book•Yanling Shize•Wu's Ancestral Hall•Fishermen, Woodcutters and Cultivators•Ancestral virtue and longevity•A hundred generations	

Decorative features	Decorative motifs	Examples of decoration	Examples of decorative motifs
	Ancient people Ancient monuments (Chinese: 先贤古迹)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Guo Ziyi at court•The West Wing•The Twenty-Four Filial Piety•The Three Towns of Wuhan	

Discussions

Due to the difficulties in the field research, the scarcity of available data and the length of the study, as well as my limited research level, there are many characters, flowers and birds, exotic animals and other subjects in the architectural decoration of the Wu Family Temple, which cannot be depicted and analyzed one by one due to time constraints. Therefore, the subsequent research can count, analyze and draw the architectural decorative parts and patterns in the ancestral hall in more detail.

The development of the country cannot be separated from the construction of culture, and the "cultural genes" contained in the traditional architectural decorative patterns highlight their important value. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct interdisciplinary research on traditional architectural decorative patterns, and the architectural decorative patterns of the

Wu Family Temple need to be explored using various research methods. Its form, ornamentation and imagery should be applied to modern design. Subsequent research can be conducted on the architectural decoration of Wu's Ancestral Hall in Hong'an, tracing the origin of traditional residential architectural decorative graphics, understanding the cultural connotation and dissemination laws of its architectural decorative graphics, exploring the combination of traditional architectural decorative patterns and modern design in the modern aesthetic environment, and giving new vitality to traditional culture.

Knowledge from Research

In the existing Chinese literature, there are few studies on the Wu Family Temple in Hong'an, and only a few studies on its architectural decoration. The study of traditional Chinese architectural decoration is relatively rich, but the study is more about the decorative elements

and characteristics of the decoration. In this study, the culture and history behind the architectural decoration of the ancestral hall have been thoroughly sorted out, from the ancestor worship to the place of worship, from the development of the ancestral hall to the clan changes, and the digital transfer of the architectural decoration of the Wu Family Temple, with certain comprehensiveness and innovation.

Conclusion

The data were obtained from the author's fieldwork, photography, measurements and computer graphics, and the summary includes the variations of the architectural space of the Wu Family Temple in Hong'an, the classification of the architectural decoration of the Wu Family Temple in Hong'an, and the cultural connotation of the architectural decoration of the Wu Family Temple in Hong'an.

In the research, a detailed study is made on the forms of architectural decoration patterns of the Wu Family Temple, firstly, a brief overview of the buildings of the Wu Family Temple is given, and secondly, the analysis and drawing of representative decorative patterns are focused on, and the graphic forms are refined by studying the parts. Different decorative patterns in different parts of the building contain different profound meanings. The decorative patterns are functional, visual, artistic and cultural, and reflect the aesthetic interest and economic strength of the builder as the content of outward communication.

The architectural decorative patterns of the Wu ancestral temple are, in terms of content.

1. The ridge line is decorated in the form of flower roof tiles with additional translucent carved dragon patterns.

2. The walls of the hall are carved with a sense of rising and falling.

3. The roof tiles are beautifully carved.

4. The doorway is richly decorated with different shapes of ventilation holes.

5. The auspicious patterns of the partition doors and windows are varied and highly decorative.

The craftsmen's meticulous carving and the owner's aesthetic consciousness have created this ancestral building of great historical and cultural value, which is worthy of the title of "the first ancestral shrine in East China" because of its incomparable artistic value in terms of architectural construction, decorative patterns and manufacturing techniques.

Suggestions

In this study, the architectural decoration of Hong'an Wu Family Temple has been studied in different categories, and the current problem mainly lies in conservation and inheritance.

For the protection and repair of architectural decoration, the principle of repairing the old as the old can be adhered to under the condition of extensive research to ensure that the architectural decoration parts retain the traces of history.

For the inheritance of architectural decoration, professional scholars provide theoretical guidance on the art of architectural decoration of ancestral halls from the perspective of architectural decoration profession; the art of architectural decoration of ancestral halls is publicized through the Internet to make people understand its cultural and artistic characteristics more deeply; the public is the main body to protect the architectural decoration of ancestral halls; relevant government departments should pay attention

to the protection of ancestral buildings and their decoration.

References

- Cai, Z.J., Zhang, Y.Q. (2012). Ways and methods of highlighting ornamental effects of traditional architectural wood carvings: The Hong'an Wu Family Temple as an example. *Journal of Huanggang Normal University* (02), 112-114.
- Cai, Z.J., Zhang, Y.Q. (2013). The artistic characteristics of the wooden carving of the Hong'an Wu Family Temple building "Wuhan Three Towns". *Grand Stage* (10), 106-107.
- Fang, S.D. (2016). Metaphorical recruitment advertisement: Functional interpretation of the wooden carving of the "Wuhan Three Towns River View" of the Wu Shrine in Hong'an, Hubei. *Decoration* (04), 130-131.
- Fang, S.D. (2018). Cohesion and outreach: Three changes in the spatial pattern of Wu's ancestral hall in Hong'an, Hubei. *Decoration* (08), 94-97.
- Fang, S.D. (2019). The mother theme of "Yu Qiao Geng Du" and family memory in the decoration of clan ancestral halls. *Decoration* (03), 124-125.
- Jiang, H., Zhan, Y.Z. (2020). The uncanny workmanship Wu Ancestor Hall. *Worker* (09), 54-55.
- Ke, D.H., Xu, S.F. (1997). The ancient folk architecture of Erdong--Wu's Ancestral Hall. *Yangtze River Construction* (06), 33.
- Leng, X.P. (2022). Analysis of cultural contexts of traditional Chinese architectural decorative images: The example of Wu's Ancestral Hall in Hong'an Steep Hill, Hubei Province. *Design Art Research* (04), 150-152.
- Li, Y.F., Zheng, M.J. (2023). A study of architectural decoration of ancestral halls in northeastern China--An example of the Wu Family Temple in Hong'an. *Research in Art Education* (01), 85-87.
- Li, S.H. (2016). A study on the art of wood carving decoration of Wu's ancestral hall in Hong'an, a traditional folk house in Huanggang area. *Journal of Huanggang Normal University* (05), 52-55.
- Tan, G.Y., Lei, Z.K. & Yin, W. (2010). Wood carving of Wuhan city--an analysis of the wooden carving of the Wu Family Temple in Hong'an, Hubei Province, "Wuhan three towns with river view"[J]. *Central China Architecture* (05), 148-150.
- Wang, Y.C. (2021). Research on the dissemination of architectural decorative graphic arts of the Wu clan ancestral hall in Hong'an County (Master's thesis), Central China University of Science and Technology, Wuhan City.
- Wang, Z.L. (2012). A brief discussion of the artistic style in the murals of the Wu Family Temple in Hong'an. *Literary Life (Art China)* (06), 131-132.
- Xin, Y.F. (2011). Into the first ancestral hall in Erdong Hong'an Wu's ancestral hall. *Interior Design and Decoration* (12), 118-121.
- Xu, Y. (2003). Peasant migration behavior in family context - A case study of Wu's ancestral village in Hubei. *Population and Economy* (05), 70-75.