

# Discussion on the Art of Lingnan Manchuria Window

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**Abstract**—The Lingnan Manchuria window which derived from the culture integration of Manchuria culture, Lingnan culture and Western culture, was a decorative and functional art form at the time of late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China. As one of the most distinctive symbol of Lingnan culture, its formation and development was influenced by a variety of factors and cultures. First, this paper is to analyze the cultural background which affected its evolution. Second, this paper is to sort out and analyze its distinctive art characteristics. The author intends to attract more attention from other scholars to focus on this endangered intangible cultural heritage, and attempt to discuss on what it can bring for us.

**Keywords**—Lingnan; the art of Manchuria window; regional culture

## I. INTRODUCTION

Integrated with multicultural elements, the Lingnan Manchuria window is the architecture decoration and art which embodies distinctive characteristic of regional culture and ethnic cultural connotation. It is extremely valuable intangible cultural heritage. The application of Lingnan Manchuria window began in late Qing Dynasty and became prevalent in Guangzhou and the Pearl River Delta area in the early twentieth Century. It vanished in the late forties as a result of the war. In the sixties, people attempted to explore and restore the production, but it declined because of the lack of material. With the rapid advancement of modernization and urbanization, Manchuria window came on the verge of extinction. Impacted by contemporary culture, the continuation of the special region culture has met various difficulties. It is apparent that the Lingnan Manchuria window and the regional culture it connoted require more attention and protection.

## II. THE ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT

Manchuria window is a window pattern commonly used by the Manchu people in Northeast China. It is made of the wooden window edge and Korean paper with large windows. Generally it is divided into upper and lower sashes and opens outwards. However, the Lingnan Manchuria window or Cantonese Manchuria window is an improved pattern of window based on the Manchuria window in Northeast China which is popularly used in Lingnan area. It is made up of the traditional wooden window edge structure inlaid with tinted glass. It mostly embodies Chinese traditional themes, using

glass material imported from the west and having it etched, engraved or sandblasting discolored. The glass is in red, yellow, blue, green, purple and gold. The overall style of it is bright and colorful, gorgeous and delicate with distinct regional characteristics of Lingnan area. It is featured by large windows, including the square and rectangular ones. Rectangular window is like sill wall window in Jiangnan region with larger area than that of the square one whereas square window involves the most typical characteristics of Lingnan Manchuria window. The square window is usually cut in the upper part of the wall with windowsills under it. The window would occupy 1/3 to 1/2 of the area of the wall. The combination is usually in the form of the group of two sashes or group of three sashes. The composition of two groups, three groups and six groups are more common with two or three sashes at the upper and lower rows respectively, or with four sashes in each of the three rows.

## III. THE ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE FORMATION OF LINGNAN MANCHURIA WINDOW

### A. The influence of Manchu culture

The Lingnan Manchuria window is the product of diversified culture. Its formation and development are influenced and penetrated by Manchuria culture, local culture and western culture. The fusion and collision of cultures fulfill the art form of Lingnan Manchuria window involving unique geographical identification and multicultural connotation.

The Manchu are originated in the "Changbai mountain and the Heilongjiang River". It is gestated and developed in the vast expanse of the Northeast China where has special geographical features and climatic conditions, which therefore determines the unique living style and architectural form of the ancient Manchu people, achieving the unique window form of "Manchuria window". Affected by the cold currents from the Siberia polar region, the Northeast area in winter is cold and dry whereas impacted by the northeast monsoon and ocean mass from North China, rain is abundant and climate is damp in summer. In order to adapt to the harsh natural environment, prevent heat loss and absorb the outdoor light as much as possible, Manchu people applied the form of large window which is pasted with vegetable oil-coated window paper (Korean paper) so as to keep it pervious to light and stay away from wind. In order to reduce wind pressure, they pasted the paper outside the window and put up columnar window edge to

withstand wind invasion, which formed the embryonic form of the traditional Manchuria window. As Manchu who respected Shaman culture came and unified the Central Plains, the new cultural pattern was bred because of the impact and penetration of Han culture, at the same time, the living style and architectural form also changed. Influenced by the architecture in Ming Dynasty, doors and windows gradually formed the various combinations of window mullions. In the Qian Long period of the Qing Dynasty, doors and windows became magnificent and vigorous. At the same time the window decorations were featured by the rich, luxurious style, most of which were in the form of sill wall window and removable window. The decorative form of Manchuria window edge became increasingly rich.



Fig. 1. The Manchuria window in Chen Family Temple of Guangzhou

#### B. *The gestation of Lingnan local culture*

As Manchu people came to Central Plains, traditional Manchuria window was also brought to Guangdong by Manchuria officers and soldiers, which then got popular in the Lingnan area with rich regional culture. After a period of fusion with local culture and continuous improvement and innovation, Manchuria window art with regional cultural characteristics of Lingnan had formed and become one of the unique symbols of Lingnan culture and architecture art.

Lingnan, the area of Baiyue people in ancient times, is a specific area in China, which refers to the Chinese southern area of the five ridges, including Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan as well as parts of Hunan and Jiangxi provinces. The semi-closed geographical environment and tropical, semitropical natural ecological environment form the special way of life style and aesthetic ideas different from that of the people in Central Plains area. Southern area of the Five Ridges borders on the sea with long coastline and has numerous islands. Because of its special geographical environment and the influence of social and historical conditions, Lingnan culture is the most powerful absorptive culture and the most successful regional culture embodying multicultural elements. In early times, it absorbed Central Plains culture and was influenced by the regional culture of Hubei, Fujian, Jiangxi and Jiangnan area. The entry and impact of foreign culture adjusted and reconstructed cultural pattern continuously and formed a distinct cultural identity with multivariate, compatible, open, pragmatic and innovative characteristics gradually. The

particular cultural personality, aesthetic concept and way of life develop the Manchuria window art with regional identification.

#### C. *The penetration of western culture*

The advantageous geographical location of the sea routes ensures the Lingnan people of earlier and more frequent exposure to western culture. The compatible and open cultural characteristics enable them to accept foreign culture as soon as possible, which has laid the foundation for the formation of the Lingnan Manchuria window.

Modern Lingnan architecture is derived and developed under the cultural background of "disputes between ancient and modern cultures, Chinese and Western cultures". In face of the advanced and aggressive Western architectural culture, modern Lingnan buildings have experienced three logical stages of development through self-adjustment, rational choice, integration and innovation. Through such process, Lingnan people constructed such buildings and gardens as the Guangzhou arcade, the Grand House in Xiguan, Dongguan Keyuan Park, Shunde Qinghui garden, Foshan Liangyuan park which integrate Chinese and Western elements. These construction style provides the special living space for the Lingnan Manchuria window, making it gradually prominent and mature in form. The western developed glass civilization makes the glass become the major material for lighting of western architectures very early. In order to decorate such transparent and translucent material, stained glass was produced and used in the design of building windows in the medieval period. Its special decoration and optical effect made it an important part of the Western church buildings from thirteenth Century to fourteenth Century. After nineteenth Century, the western architectural culture, religious culture and stained glass art, technology and materials were brought to Lingnan area with the opening of the trading ports. Together with the common infiltration of western culture and local culture, Lingnan Manchuria window began to show distinct personalities.

### IV. THE ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF LINGNAN MANCHURIA WINDOW

#### A. *Generous colored decoration style*

Ornate wooden window edge and stained glass with strong color contrast enable Manchuria window to glow gorgeous vitality, which becomes the magnificent one among Lingnan architectures and gardens. They are also one of its most representative artistic features. Southern area of the Five Ridges is located in tropical and subtropical areas with abundant rainfall and light, breeding rich plant resources and fine natural ecological environment. In order to fit in with natural environment harmoniously, Lingnan buildings and gardens show strong natural adaptability. Both the external and internal space tend to show the decorative style of being thick and heavy in colors, full of vitality, and complement with the colorful natural ecological environment around. The main part of the building is commonly decorated by bright colors, such as

bright gray sculptures, porcelain inlay art which are used in roof of the building and garden gable, showing a lively sense of rhythm and rhyme. The wooden carving, stone carving, porcelain carving and indoor furniture ornaments inside and outside the building are coordinated and consistent in decoration style, which demonstrates the vigorous vitality Lingnan regional culture together with gorgeous Manchuria window.

First, the opening forms of Lingnan Manchuria window are diversified, including removable, rotating on the axis, vertically sliding windows and so on. In order to adapt to different lighting and ventilation requirements, the combination of Manchuria window are various and rich, so are the combinations and patterns of window edge, including ice crack, square words, Chinese Character Ya Shape, flower knots, water-caltrop flower pattern, propitious knots and other traditional styles. The decorative patterns are gorgeous, rich in layers and change, mutually reflect the surrounding delicate carved wooden doors. Secondly, the colored glass embedded between the window edges are in high saturation colors, such as red, yellow, blue, green, purple and gold. The assortment of stained color often shows strong color contrast with the interchangeable utilization of reddish orange and viridescence, displaying heavy ink and gorgeous colors together with ornate wooden windows. The transparent and translucent stained glass in Lingnan area shine brightly in ample sunshine, which are gorgeously eye-catching. The indoor space environment is colorful, lustrous and dazzling immersed in it. Light and shade become the most ingenious and natural indoor decorative elements. Lingnan Manchuria window at the moment is the interpretation of light aesthetics, material aesthetics, and color aesthetics.

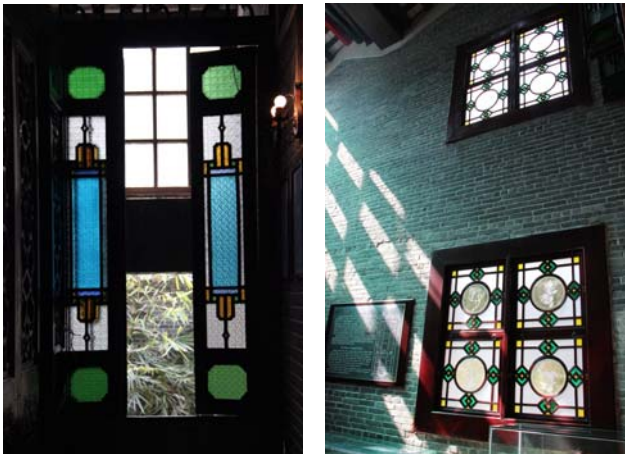


Fig. 2. The Manchuria window in Xiguan Mansion of Guangzhou

### B. Secular conception

The window arris, door decoration and stained glass patterns of Lingnan Manchuria window mainly depict the subjects with a strong flavor of life and the aesthetic taste of public tendency which incisively interpret the Lingnan people's character of advocating nature, paying attention to

enjoyment and life. Decorative subjects include patterns of the local plants such as litchi, pineapple, longan and bergamot which are of strong local cultural characteristics; the local landscape which embodies the aesthetic pursuit of the literati; animals and plants such as pine, bamboo, plum, pomegranate, peony, lotus, magpie, bees and butterflies which are of profound ethical color and auspicious meanings; artifacts such as jade, Ruyi, coins, ceramics, tiles and beads; auspicious sample text and works of calligraphy taking classical poetry as the theme, which show secular decorative style, depicting Lingnan people's aesthetic ideal of pursuing novelty, advocating nature and being pragmatic. Since the Song Dynasty, the life and commercial tendency of the city began to reveal with the prosperity and development of commerce and transportation. In the middle of the Ming Dynasty, such tendency became more significant with the germination of capitalism. The prosperity of city and the commodity economy enlarge the number of citizens. Civic consciousness as a kind of social ideology boarded the stage of history. Traditional thought of physiocracy and antibusiness gradually disintegrated, the aesthetic ideas of civil tendency appeared in the society and people's life. After the Ming and Qing Dynasties, due to its special geographical location, Lingnan had become an important economic and commercial region. Guangzhou had become the important trading ports. The nourishment of economy and commerce took the Lingnan people into the secular and the public aesthetic world, and also cultivate the pragmatic spirit of them. Starting from Lingnan scholar Chen Baisha's ideas of "having nature as purport" and "valuing self-perception" in the mid Ming Dynasty, Lingnan people have pursued the truth of life, enjoying the process and significance of life, paying attention to the actual sensory, physical and mental experience, rather than being constrained to the traditional forms and patterns as well as the mannerism and illusory elegant. Both the landscape architecture and living appliances show regional culture characteristics of the coexistence of diversified elements and standing wear. Manchuria window in Guangdong area is the clever use of color and optical principle. People could view the snow scenery in the evergreen Guangdong through the turquoise glass. Some gardens boldly design seasonal windows. The glass of different colors fused with the natural environment outside create the transformation of beauty throughout four seasons, full of dynamic and imagination, which reveal Lingnan people's psychology and aesthetic attitude of following the law of nature, being innovative, creative and entertaining completely.

### C. Painting techniques combining Chinese and Western elements

Another remarkable artistic feature of Lingnan Manchuria window is its painting techniques combining Chinese and Western elements. Such combination is not constrained and embodied in the various aspects of conception, composition, painting techniques and styles, but also makes us deeply feel the fusion of two cultures, expressing their feelings, experience

and mood in unique way of combining Chinese and Western cultures via the Manchuria window.

It is common to use the painting and calligraphy works for interior decoration in Chinese traditional architecture. The intention and aesthetics of Chinese traditional painting and calligraphy works can also be seen in the design of Lingnan Manchuria window. First of all, Lingnan people apply the concepts of "original painting" and "substrate" which are usually used in traditional painting and calligraphy works. The original painting as the visual center of the window decoration usually use the whole traditional calligraphy and painting as decorations with the use of such glass technologies as carving, sandblasting, etching introduced from the west to portray a variety of subjects and content such as China traditional flower and bird, landscape as well as Lingnan fruits. The substrate is the other part except the original painting which is the wooden window edge with the application of traditional production methods of the *douxin* (a way of jointing wooden strips into various continuous geometric patterns), garlanding, rilievo, openwork carving, convex nail. The window edge has variety of patterns which are delicate and overelaborate, making the color glass more dazzlingly beautiful. The painting in the stained glass is often the fusion of the traditional composition and painting techniques of Chinese painting style and Western realistic painting techniques. Lingnan Manchuria window keeps Chinese painting conception, characteristics, composition, ink and other aesthetic tendency, and at the same time, it boldly combines with the projection method, light and shade skills in western paintings, which integrate abstraction and reality, artistic conception and vividness, forming the unique style of Lingnan painting art. Stained glass used are tinted glass imported from France, Britain and Italy which are well-developed in the glass industry, highlighting the abstract color effect of 'colors involved in colors'. The application of the engraving and etching bring out the varieties of shades, light and shade, obscurity and clearness, interpreting Chinese painting techniques and Western painting realistic style and also showing inclusive and equitable spirit and aesthetic ideal of Lingnan people.

## V. CONCLUSION

Cai Yuanpei told us: "Throughout history, the contact of different cultures will produce a new culture." The Lingnan Manchuria window art which combines the Manchu culture, local culture, western culture is a kind of product of the characteristic new culture, which not only shows us the unique artistic features and aesthetic tendency, and more importantly, it interprets and analyzes the spiritual character and core of Lingnan culture, stimulating our reflection. In the face of foreign culture, Lingnan modern culture has experienced contradicted and complex cultural selection and self-examination process. On the one hand, active and creative integration into the foreign culture achieves its richness and diversity of culture. On the one hand, rational reflection eventually gives birth to the Manchuria window art combining Chinese and western cultural elements rather than lose its cultural identity because of the impacts of foreign culture. Facing the infiltration of foreign cultures today, we are in search of the ways of realizing cultural and artistic self-consciousness. Cultural choice should be open and rational, on the one hand, we should keep fully inclusive and equitable, open and tolerant mind; on the other hand, we should hold a rational attitude, stick to the original cultural character and national spirit so as to realize the cultural self-awareness, self-reflection and self-creation as well as the artistic creation of extraordinary national character.

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Fig. 3. The Manchuria window in Chen Family Temple of Guangzhou