

# Interpretation of the Causes of Decorative Art of Traditional Dwellings in Guanzhong, Shaanxi

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**Abstract**—Guanzhong dwellings are one of the typical representatives of dwellings in the north. Because of their unique architectural space form and decorative techniques, they have become the physical carrier of Chinese traditional culture. Through the interpretation of the decorative arts characteristics of Guanzhong dwellings, the article analyzes the causes of its natural, social and cultural purposes. The purpose is to discover the essential difference from other dwellings and play a positive role in the study and excavation of traditional culture in contemporary architectural display design.

**Keywords**—Guanzhong dwellings; architectural decoration; artistic style

## I. INTRODUCTION

The central part of Shaanxi Province is often referred to as the Guanzhong area. It starts from Shaoguan in the east, Baoji in the west, Qinling in the south, and the Northern Shaanxi Plateau in the north. It is known as the “eight hundred miles of Qinchuan”. The Weihe River is acrossed through this area from east to west. And this area is surrounded by the eight rivers of 泾 (Jing River), 渭 (Wei River), 泾 (Chan River), 灞 (Ba River), 沔 (Feng River), 涝 (Lao River), 洛 (Yu River), and 洛 (Hao River), and is the most affluent area in Shaanxi. Because of the flat terrain, fertile soil and convenient transportation, since the Zhou, Qin, Han and Tang Dynasties, as the center of politics, culture and economy, after thousands of years of historical accumulation, it has shown a rich historical source and cultural heritage, and Guanzhong dwellings as witnesses. The bearing of history not only satisfies the practical needs of people living, but also highlights the artistic charm of Chinese civilization.

## II. OVERVIEW OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE DWELLINGS IN GUANZHONG

As the birthplace of Chinese civilization, the Guanzhong area was first discovered here. It has experienced the changes of the times and the baptism of the years for thousands of years. The unique charm of Guanzhong dwelling instruments makes it a typical representative of northern dwellings. The average annual temperature in the Guanzhong area is 12-13.6 °C, the frost-free period is 207 days, and the annual rainfall is 604 mm. It belongs to the warm temperate zone, with four distinct seasons, long winter and summer, and drought in summer. [1] The layout of Guanzhong dwellings

is compact and the land is saved, following the basic form of traditional quadrangle courtyards. The main layout feature is to arrange houses along the longitudinal axis, organize the courtyard, and form a long and narrow layout. Due to the narrow use of land and the layout of houses along the perimeter, the outdoor space between houses generally follows the basic layout of traditional courtyards. Most of the dwellings are single-story sloping roofs with wood structure, adobe wall and rammed earth wall as the main materials, showing the layout of “deep house, narrow courtyard and being closed”.

## III. GUANZHONG DWELLINGS ARCHITECTURE DECORATION FEATURES

Guanzhong dwellings have a long history. At present, many houses in the Ming and Qing Dynasties are preserved in various towns, and the dwellings in Xi'an, Sanyuan and Hancheng are particularly representative. From the aspects of land use, layout, space treatment and interior decoration, Shaanxi's cultural heritage and humanistic characteristics are fully embodied. Guanzhong dwellings generally have the characteristics of compact layout, economical land use, strict material selection and construction quality, flexible indoor and outdoor space treatment, and high level of decorative arts. They are valuable heritage of Chinese architectural culture. Under the premise of satisfying basic living, the dwellings make full use of natural resources and geographical features, embody the spirit and connotation of Chinese cultural traditions, integrate Confucian ritual system into the architectural form, pay attention to the combination of architectural form function and decoration, and highlight the ceremonial system and profound features. Its planar relationship and spatial organization still belong to the traditional Chinese courtyard style. Its main layout features are that the houses are always laid out along the longitudinal axis, the courtyards are laid out on the basis of halls in layers, and it is vertically developed as the long and narrow layout of the layout form.

### A. Drawing on Local Resources and Adjusting Measures to Local Conditions

Guanzhong is located in the eastern part of the Qinling Mountains, with an altitude of 300-800 meters. It is a warm temperate climate with fertile land resources and rich

vegetation. However, the timbers that are easy to construct are scarce. Therefore, the single-story sloping roof with wood structure, adobe wall and rammed earth wall as the main materials is mainly used, with self-made brick and dense raft beams structures, which reflects the structural characteristics of brick and wood. The construction of dwellings fully considers the natural environment and conditions. The overall style has a direct relationship with the climate and geographical environment of the north. The adobe walls constructed with rammed earth technology are easy to keep warm, easy to obtain materials and low in cost.

#### *B. Being Great in Style and Being Scientific and Reasonable*

The main feature of the Guanzhong narrow courtyard dwellings is that the dwellings are layout along the vertical axis as well as the organization of the courtyards. The most common form of this layout is the single-courtyard plan, with a separate entrance and multiple entrances. From front to back, there are the concierge, the courtyard, the wing-room and the main room on both sides. The main room is located on the central axis, and its base height, floor height and depth are relatively large, forming a center of the whole courtyard. It is customary for the elders of the family to live and meet, and to use for ancestor worship and celebration. The base of the wing-room and the doorway are slightly lower, and the scale is also small. The wing-rooms are for the younger generation to live in, and they are allocated according to the principle of the elder brother in the east and younger brother in the west. The porter has many uses and can be used as a guest room, study room, living room and storage room. The Guanzhong dwellings are mostly built with soil and wood and mortise and tenon joint embedded construction techniques. Against the influence of strong historical and cultural backgrounds, the constructors pay attention to traditional building techniques and inheritance and upgrading. The overall building creation craftsmanship is in grandeur, and the spatial volume spans large and it is symmetric. It highlights comprehensive functions such as waterproofing, sand prevention, fire prevention and earthquake prevention.

#### *C. Being Rigorous in Construction and Emphasizing on Inheritance*

Under the influence of feudal rule and ethics, the construction of Guanzhong dwellings is strict. The tools are diverse, the number of rituals is fine, and the craftsmanship is rigorous and sophisticated, fully embodying the spirit of traditional culture, highlighting the family education, paying attention to yin and yang, old and young, respectful and orderly, and sticking to the etiquette.

The houses are arranged along the longitudinal axis, and the courtyards are organized to form a long and narrow layout. Due to the narrow use of land and the layout of houses along the perimeter, the outdoor space between the houses naturally forms a narrow quadrangle courtyard. The aspect ratio of the courtyard is 4:1. The deep house, narrow courtyard and being closed are the main features of the dwellings in Guanzhong areas. [3] It can be said that this is

the layout form of the residential quadrangle courtyard house. Its design concept is the same as that of the ancient Xianyang Palace building, with a deep local concept and a sense of awe. Usually the gate is directly facing the gable of the wing-room. The gable is in the form of a shadow wall. It is decorated with brick-carved shrine, or characters decoration of "福 (fortune)" and "寿 (longevity)". A small vestibule is formed in the front of the gate and the shadow wall. Turning left to a side door, people can enter the brighter stretched inner courtyard. In the sense of spatial sequence, it is closed outside and open inside, and small before and large later. There is shift of rise and fall of width, light and shade, and virtual and reality.

#### *D. Beautiful Decoration and Profound Meaning*

The decorative art of Guanzhong dwellings fully reflects the traditional morality and ethics of the Central Plains culture, as well as people's life beliefs and value orientations, which make people drenched in this culture unconsciously. As a carrier of traditional culture, dwellings must reflect the cultural background they rely on. [2] The theme and content of Guanzhong residential decoration conveys the traditional beauty behind this and the essence of beauty advocated by traditional Chinese Confucianism. The construction focuses on ridges and gable decorations, and highlights the stone structure of the shadow walls and corners. The carving of auspicious patterns symbolizes the traditional concept of living in peace, avoiding evil spirits, and praying for harmony. The traditional dwellings in Guanzhong are rich in content, such as stone carving, wood carving, brick carving, shadow walls, porches, flower windows, etc. The techniques are diverse, and the shape is smart with a special artistic creation. The wooden frame is composed of a structure and a decoration as a whole. The spine and the beam head are decorated with carvings, and the large dwellings are carved and painted. In order to strengthen the stability of the spine, it is often necessary to set a supporting pier on both sides, or to replace the spine with a carved pier. The hall is built with "no suspended ceiling", painted with lacquer, and organically integrated with doors, windows, partitions, furniture, etc. into a whole, simple and elegant.

### IV. ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GUANZHONG DWELLINGS

#### *A. Natural Environment Causes*

1) *Wood is scarce but in high quality, and the stone and earth resources are rich:* The Guanzhong dwellings construction features of wood rafter as the frame and rammed earth as the block are mainly affected by local vegetation resources. Due to the location of the plains, there are fewer arbor species in the vegetation, limited production, and limited by transportation and other problems. In the process of construction, the wood materials used in the beam are relatively scarce.

The loess used in the construction is special sediment of the Quaternary continental facies. Shaanxi is also the province with the most loess deposits in China. The rich

loess resources have become the best material for the construction of foundations and walls, and have the advantages of convenient materials and low cost.

2) *The four seasons are distinct, the spring and autumn are short, the winter wind is strong, and the summer sunlight is hot:* The Guanzhong area is hot and rainy in summer and cold and dry in winter, with an average annual temperature of 12-13.6 °C, a frost-free period of 207 days, and an annual rainfall of 604 mm, which belongs to the warm temperate zone. It has four distinct seasons, long winter and summer, and drought in summer. Due to the summer heat, more houses take the layout of a narrow north and south inner court, so that the inner court is in the shadow area to make the summer cooler. Guanzhong dwellings generally follow the traditional courtyard-style basic layout, but the difference is that because the general land is narrow, and the inner courtyard is narrow and long, forming a narrow courtyard pattern. Due to the hot summers in the Guanzhong area, the sun protection is more important in the dwellings. The narrow courtyard is covered by the wing-rooms, which makes the inner courtyard in the shadow for most of the time, giving people a sense of cool.

In the winter, affected by the high atmospheric pressure of Siberia, the temperature is low and cold and the weather is dry, and the northwest wind is strong, so the residential buildings are mostly closed and towering in the northwest wall. The door is opened in the southeast direction, and the rammed earth wall makes full use of the thermal insulation and drought resistance characteristics of the soil wall, playing a good shielding role.

#### B. Social Environment Causes

Since the Qin Dynasty, thirteen dynasties' capitals has been founding with the center of Xi'an in Guanzhong area. Historically, it is an important political, economic and cultural core area of China. There are many construction workers and skilled craftsmen. The requirements for construction are extremely demanding, the inheritance of techniques and techniques is orderly and complete, and it is influenced by the court building, which makes the residences have typical features such as rigorous in construction and design, fine in decorative carvings, and regular in layout rules.

Since many of the capitals have been built here, the Guanzhong area has had a large population since ancient times, and the villages are densely populated. The narrow land for human settlements has become the primary problem facing by the construction of the building. Therefore, the Guanzhong dwellings are generally narrow, reducing the width of the land for homesteads and increasing the depth to save construction land, which is especially important for the Guanzhong area where the land is fertile and the population is dense.

#### C. Cultural Environment Causes

In western countries, architecture is known as the art of solidification, and it has rich cultural connotations and

artistic beauty. Shaanxi dwellings have a long history. Through the form of architectural sculptures, the dwellings illustrate the essence and creed of traditional culture. The content they expressed is all-encompassing. They display the traditional Chinese cultural connotations from various aspects such as totem, reproduction worship, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and auspicious beasts, which are more based on folk beliefs, poetry classics, myths and legends, historical allusions, etc. The composition, the sleek design, and the exquisite and great technique give the meaning of enlightenment and inherit the traditional virtues of the country.

1) *The specification of "ritual" and the inheritance of "Confucianism":* The decorative art of Guanzhong dwellings fully reflects the traditional morality and ethics of the Central Plains culture, as well as people's life beliefs and value orientations, which make people drenched in this culture unconsciously. The decorative theme and content of the architecture conveys the traditional culture behind and the nature of the beauty advocated by traditional Chinese Confucianism. The architectural art of Guanzhong dwellings is formed against the background of Chinese Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. In the spatial layout, it follows a strict clear hierarchical order of axis relationship, and is inherited and embodied in the carvings of the architectural components such as door skirts, gables, and screen walls in houses. The performance themes include the legendary stories of Confucianism such as "24 Filial Piety", the historical allusions of loyalty and filial piety, etc., embodying the principles and ambitions of the master to do things, and playing a role in educating the children and grandchildren.

2) *The embodiment of traditional Fengshui and yin and yang philosophy:* The Chinese Fengshui theory was originally developed to avoid the natural disasters and adapt to the needs of the natural environment. It was developed for the search for ideal caves and gradually has been given ideological connotations. The preference of choosing the sunny, sheltered, and near-water areas reflects the simple scientific understanding of the ancestors on living environment.

The site selection and construction of Guanzhong dwellings is most deeply influenced by traditional Fengshui, Confucian rituals, philosophical culture and simple ecological thoughts. The Fengshui thought regards the residence as the "the hub of yin and yang, the model of human relations", reflecting the spatial pattern and ethical relationship of human social life, praying for harmony between human beings and nature. The courtyard space of Guanzhong dwellings is surrounded by the houses around. There are four relationships of yin and yang of the "real" outside and "virtual" inside, primary and secondary of the halls, the wing-rooms on both sides, and criss-cross paths. At the same time, Guanzhong quadrangle courtyard is also a concentrated expression of the four emblematic symbols, the four directions, the four seasons and the five elements concepts.

3) *The traditional concept of living in peace, avoiding evil spirits and praying for fortune*: The pray for a better life is the most sincere wish of every citizen, especially in the decorative display of Guanzhong dwellings. The materials, the construction techniques, the cultural treatment of indoor and outdoor culture, and the use of exquisite decorative carving art used in Guanzhong traditional dwellings, not only make the building space itself meets the needs of people's daily life, but also create aesthetic effects with different tastes and rich changes, emphasizing the shape and material, the composition of the details, the color of the symbol processing and the appearance of the building itself, and forming its own independence, which profoundly embody the philosophical thoughts and the essence of traditional culture of the Chinese nation's "harmony between man and nature". The dwellings adopt a large number of auspicious birds and beasts, oral luck patterns and auspicious gods to decorate various building structures. In the building elements such as gables, ridge beasts, chitou (a supporting components of ancient Chinese buildings), door piers, screen walls, and door carvings, through representation of the patterns of happiness and longevity auspicious beasts and amulets for house-guarding by brick carvings, stone carvings and wood carvings, the dwellings fully express people's desire for a better life and the pursuit of love.

## V. CONCLUSION

The use of tool materials, construction technology, architectural space architecture, and exquisite decorative carving art in Guanzhong traditional residential buildings not only satisfies the needs of people's daily life, but also creates aesthetic tastes with rich cultural connotations. At the same time, it also reflects the concept of courtesy and customs. This makes the Guanzhong folk architecture form its own unique regional temperament: simple and vigorous, and magnificent and great. It profoundly embodies the philosophical ideology of the Chinese nation and the essence of traditional culture — "harmonious culture". Traditional cultural beliefs, customs, taboos, etiquette and other cultural elements are reflected in many aspects of the art, with multi-faceted academic value. This also makes the traditional dwellings in Guanzhong area unique in the style of national dwellings, with strong regional and cultural characteristics.

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