

Research on the Decorative Art of Traditional Dwelling Architecture in Huanggang Region

Take Hongan Wushi Temple as Example

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Abstract—Wushi Temple is located in the Hongan County, Huanggang city, Hubei province, which is an old revolutionary area. The architectural feature of Wushi Temple is distinct, with various decorative arts, is a shining pearl of the traditional residential architecture in Huanggang area. This article explores and analyzes the architectural and decorative art of Hongan Wushi Temple from wood carving art, stone carving art, colored drawing in the temple building.

Keywords—Huanggang; dwellings; Wushi Temple; decorative arts

I. BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF HONGAN WUSHI TEMPLE

Wushi Temple is located in Doushan village where is about 5 kilometers away from northeast of Baliwan town, Hongan County, Hubei Province. According to introduction records of Wushi genealogy at the temple, Wushi Temple was built in the 28th year of Qianlong period in the Qing Dynasty (AD 1763), after then, it was destroyed by fire. It was rebuilt in tenth year of Tongzhi period (AD 1871); unfortunately, it was again destroyed by fire. In the 28th year of Guangxu (AD 1902), Wu's brothers in Doushan who was engaged in trade in other place sponsored to rebuild the temple, taking two years to complete it with thousands of silvers. The existing Wushi Temple has the history of more than one hundred years, experiencing wind and rain and countless frustrations, with its internal layout preserved completely, but the loss of interior decoration is heavy, and the painting art fades gradually due to the wind and rain, and partially breaks off, while some architectural sculptures, as the main decorative form are preserved completely.

As Wushi ancestral hall of Wushi family, Wushi Temple occupies the best location, it is different from ordinary dwellings, according to the local geomantic site selection and sit in the north, the front door is opened and the main wall is 18° included angle, slightly to northeast. The entire complex covers an area of about 3000 square meters, construction area of 1128 square meters, with brick, wood and stone structure. Wushi Temple memorial arch gate tower "Fig. 1", has five rooms, three entering courtyard, quadrangle dwellings layout. And the main floor of building is composed of the front Guanle building, middle worship building, and back ancestry temple. Between the front, middle and back, there are garden

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interval, both sides of the corridors are connected, layout rigorous, one integrated mass. Wushi Temple building has a large scale; the structure is compact, all kinds of ancient building decoration technique are complete.



Fig. 1. Wushi Temple memorial arch gate tower

II. DECORATIVE ART OF HONGAN WUSHI TEMPLE BUILDING

The existing Hongan Wushi Temple was built in more than one hundred years ago, and after one hundred years' vicissitudes of life, when you come into Wushi Temple, the eye-catching carvings and paintings still bring you strong shock to the people: in such a remote village, incredibly still is so rich architectural styles and artistic adornment forms?

Wushi Temple's architectural and decorative art is mainly manifested in the wood carving, stone carving and painting.

A. Wood Carving

In Wushi Temple, all wooden structure parts have exquisite carvings, such as beams, arch, sparrow brace, hanging stylus, railing, door and window, armrest, and all building components are fine woodcarving adornment. The expressional language of woodcarving has diversity, integrating high relief, shallow relief, carved into a systemic whole, applying the oblique carving method, volume compression method and other expressional languages of sculpture thoroughly. It is said that construction team of Wushi Temple was the most famous Xiaojia masons team and

famous Huang Xiaobang woodworking team in Hunan and Hubei provinces. They were particularly good at all engraved painting and carving. Compared with other buildings in this region, the woodcarving art of Wushi Temple can make people heart stirring which is mainly from the following several aspects.

1) *Changeable shape of composition*: Traditional architectural woodcarving is mainly based on the square, and the round and the fan-shaped are more commonly. The woodcarvings in Wushi Temple present a diverse composition form, except the common square, round, fan-shaped, elliptical structure, the most distinctive view is the “Three Towns of Wuhan” wood carving works of long scroll type in Guanle building in the ancestral temple as shown in “Fig. 2”.



Fig. 2. The “Three Towns of Wuhan” wood carving works of long scroll type in Guanle building in the ancestral temple

This work is about 9 meters in length, about 50 cm in width and about 40 centimeters in thickness, made of the whole section of camphorwood, using the long scroll type engraving. Such a long scroll type woodcarving work with such a large length-width difference ratio is very rare. The author of the woodcarving work must understand the skills of long scroll painting. The idea of “Three Towns of Wuhan” is different in approach but equally satisfactory in result, compared with the painting of “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” of Zhang Zeduan in the Song Dynasty.

In order to reflect the flourishing of the three towns of Wuhan, the work's author used the scatterplot perspective rule in Chinese ancient painting. The picture from left to right in turn shows the three towns of Wuchang, Hanyang, Hankou, with grand scene, numerous characters, rich scenery layer, and strong visual effect. Looking at the work carefully, you will feel like that you sit in the boat, with the scene and the object slowly spreading, view and admire the beautiful scenery from Wuchang to Hanyang and then to Hankou, indulging in exquisite carver of the work and lifelike portrayal.

The woodcarving is placed on the beam frame of the drama stage of Guanle Building, just at the front of the stage. It is about 9 meters wide between the two columns, and the beam frame is about 3 meters away from the ground, standing at the visual center and playing a supporting role. Great care is bestowed upon the long scroll composition of “Three Towns of Wuhan”, of which scatter perspective is beneficial to show majestic scene, not only displaying the bustling scene of three towns of Wuhan, but also reasonably using the whole section of camphor wood. The whole picture with changeable character modeling, rich representation form and skilled techniques is stirring, making the stage more wonderful.

Such a long scroll with such a large length-width difference ratio is extremely rare in building woodcarving decorations, and the composition form of the woodcarving “Three Towns of Wuhan” enriches the form of woodcarving composition.

2) *Abundant in subject*: Influenced by the traditional Chinese Confucian culture, the expressive theme of the Chinese traditional architectural woodcarving has obvious moral enlightenment function, and as the illustration, woodcarving work is intuitive and visual. It combines the functions of moral education, building decoration, art performance functions in a systemic whole, not only decorating the construction, but also enriching the building space, and expressing the appeal with intuitive picture, and exerting a subtle influence on education of the generations in the future.

In Ming and Qing architectural woodcarving adornment, the common expressing theme can be summarized into four categories: the first is full of positive energy myths and legends, opera stories; the second is auspicious implies text, rare birds and animals; the third is beautiful flowers and plants modeling on behalf of riches and honor; the fourth is fisherman, woodcutter, farmer and scholar to reflect the basic social life type. The wood carving decorations in Wushi Temple include the common expressing themes such as myths, legends, opera stories, rare birds and animals, fisherman, woodcutter, farmer and scholar and also have rare realistic works of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The realistic work “Three Towns of Wuhan” is the largest woodcarving work in Wushi Temple, which has the best display position and the most abundant depicting hierarchy. It applies the realistic technique to represent the scenes of Wuchang, Hanyang, Hankou, the three towns of Wuhan along the river from left to right. By careful analysis, we can see that on the about 9 meters long camphorwood engraved meanderingly the Wuchang city, Wusheng gate, Yanbo building, Hanyang gate, Huanghe building, with buildings of different styles and streets of different widths inside the gate tower, of which Hanyang landscapes and its representative construction include Qingchuan pavilion, Guishan Mountain and the worship hall on the top of mountain, as well as the Dragon King Temple of Hankou, Xianghe river dock and China Merchants Group dock and the concession architecture with western style; and sparkling river runs through the three towns of Wuhan. In these buildings, streets, wharfs and river boats were naturally interspersed with people who have different actions, rich and vivid expression, including rowing boatman, carting driver, chatting crowd, unloading porters, sailor of teasing the dog, to reproduce the life scene and urban landscape in that time.

Realistic theme “Three Towns of Wuhan” breaks through the situation of moral enlightenment function theme dominating woodcarving works, such as blessing, auspicious message, moral enlightenment and others, and it enriches the expressive theme of woodcutting.

3) *Flexible expression technique*: works of Wushi Temple, according to the needs of woodcarving content, applied flexible and varied expressive way, and flexibly combined and used a variety of carving techniques: deep relief, bas-relief, full relief, hollow-out carving, line carving, oblique carving and other expression means, to constitute many elegant and vivid images.

“Hundred mice playing grapes” “Fig. 3” is a classical woodcarving works of Wushi Temple. It is placed between the two right middle columns and the beam of the middle worship temple, and due to the large column spacing, the Queti (supporting wood) is not connected but separated for modeling, so a larger and vivid “hundred mice playing grapes” picture is constituted.

A comprehensive expression technique of full relief, hollow-out carving, line carving, and oblique carving is flexibly applied for the “hundred mice playing grape” picture. In the picture, variant expression techniques are applied for the same kind object, for example some grape vines are of deep relief, some are of full relief; some grapes are of deep relief, some are of bas-relief; the veins of the grape leaves are of line carving; some mice heads are of full relief, the body is of combined deep relief and bas-relief; the boundaries between the body and the background are of oblique carving; the hair on mice is of line carving of beeline and curve. Mice are hidden or revealed among the grapes and vines, with a variety of carving expression technique, so as to it effectively divides the layers of space between mice and grapes, vividly representing the appearance of smart mice.

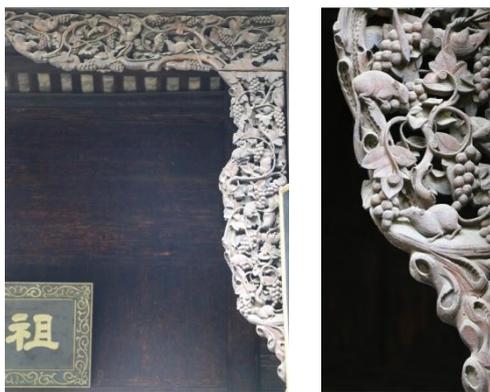


Fig. 3. Hundred mice playing grape. overall Queti (left) and details (right).

B. Stone Carving

In the territory of Hongan County, it is now found 56 ore deposits and mineralization points, among which, 21 orefields can be exploited and utilized, mainly including granite, marble, serpentine, silica, barite, fluorite, rutile, quartz, etc. Natural stone reserves provide the guarantee for the stone carving decoration of Wushi Temple. Granite is commonly known as bluestone that is the main material used for the Wushi Temple stone carvings. Bluestone surface texture is loose, easy for mining, with strong water imbibition and easy weathering, mostly flaky or streaky, not applicable for deep processing, mostly used for paving of roads, etc. The deep bluestone has relatively dense texture, large hardness, difficult for mining, mostly used as the bearing part and the decoration part that needs deep processing.

Wushi Temple stone carving decoration is mainly used in the memorial arch gate house, stone fence and plinth of nave, to connect the long corridor chapter of the front hall and nave. Each building component under the precondition of satisfying practical function is as far as possible artistic, the stone

carving expression technique of the different building component is different. For the bearing part of the building such as the plinth, the stone carving decoration methods are mainly shallow layer line carving, and the content is mainly based on the vol-grass pattern and flowers pattern “Fig. 4”, which have adornment effect, and also do not affect the bearing function of the plinth; The long corridor chapter connecting to the front hall and nave is mainly based on the full relief, with small animals carved as the decoration “Fig. 5”. The animal model is exaggerative, in a simple way of cutting, and the form is lifelike. The modeling technique is mainly based on the full relief, integrated with deep relief and bas-relief and line carving. The large sculpture is decorated on the memorial archway type gate tower and stone fence.



Fig. 4. The vol-grass pattern and flowers pattern



Fig. 5. Small animals carved as the decoration

Due to large painting format, it can be designed with more complex scenarios, and the contents are mostly historical allusions, myths, legends and life scenes “Fig. 6”. According to the need of the scene, the carving techniques are adjusted, as shown in “Fig. 6”, for standing out the front and back spatial layer, the bole and leaves are processed with deep relief, and local tree stem with openwork carving; for the same line model, the left bottom corner at the picture embodies the rock texture, with stiff lines, while the character’s clothes line is fluent and elegant.



Fig. 6. Large Painting format with historical allusions, myths, legends and life scenes

C. Colored Drawing and Pattern

The frame drawn up with pigment on the building components is the colored drawing for building. Divided from region, China architecture colored drawing can be divided into northern and southern colored drawing. The coloring of the northern colored drawing is bold, with beautiful and gorgeous colors; as the representative, the royal colored drawing sets off the resplendent and magnificent effect. The colored drawing in the south is implicative, plain and neat, quietly elegant, just like the reserved literati, represented by Su style colored drawing. Wushi Temple is located in remote mountainous areas in Hubei, with its colored drawing form not subject to the southern Su style colored drawing, having free and concise rural style. The composition is mainly based on the square and circular form, and the coloring is commonly black, white, red, green, and blue, which is the frequently-used color in that time.

The colored drawing of Wushi Temple is mainly distributed in the outside walls and interior building wooden parts.

The comprehensible picture-story form is used on the peripheral walls of ancestral temple, easy to understand, presenting the Chinese classical story of the "Romance of the Western Chamber". "Romance of the Western Chamber" is a flag of youth to revolt against feudal ethical code in pursuit of true love and constant struggle. On the peripheral walls, a total of 124 pictures were drawn, on the east wall and the west wall are 57 pictures respectively, on the south wall is 10 pictures, all of which are horizontal type, and each picture size is consistent, 94 cm long, 36 cm wide "Fig. 7". The paintings is mainly based on the traditional Chinese painting technique with exact delineation and enriched colours, and the lines are fluent, showing various character shapes and vivid looks.



Fig. 7. "Romance of the Western Chamber"

Although they are painted by folk painters, the picture has artistic idea, strong and gorgeous colors, plump character

portrayal, expressing a vivid story. Folk artists are not subject to the rules and limits of colored drawing, without excessive pursuit of literariness and humanities of murals, and they give full play to the freedom of imagination, and by their understanding of "Romance of the Western Chamber", use the form of pictures to reflect the pursuit of civilians for spiritual needs. On the gable of the bounding wall surface, the round composition is most used, to draw the natural landscape for wall decorations "Fig. 8".



Fig. 8. The round composition and the natural landscape for wall decorations

The wooden structure on the drama stage top of the Guanle building in Wushi Temple is decorated with the Eight Diagrams that has a white rendering and is drawn with black, white, and blue, green, red and other colors "Fig. 9". The black and red is used for the pattern of Eight Diagrams, representing the Yin qi and Yang qi, with fishlike patterns, counterclockwise encircling each other. The fishlike patterns of the Eight Diagrams have a circle more than that of common Eight Diagrams, with its periphery decorated with auspicious clouds and flame pattern. In the eight diagrams it also is decorated with the music instruments of eight immortals in the Chinese folklore, commonly known as eight immortals or eight treasures.



Fig. 9. The Eight Diagrams

Zhang Guolao's percussion instrument made of bamboo, Han Xiangzi's flute, He Xiangzi's lotus "Fig. 10", Tiegua Li's gourd, Zhong Lique's fan, Royal Uncle Cao's jade plate, Lancaihe's basket, all have infinite strength in the Chinese myths and legends. Strong colors are boldly applied for the eight immortals, including red, green, blue and other colors,

with clear theme, smooth lines. The flowing lines and the reasonable arrangement of the front and the back make the picture active and energetic. The eight immortals also have the metaphors of Wu's family wishing their future generations can have abilities as like the eight immortals and do their best to make Wu's family prosperous.



Fig. 10. He Xiangnu's lotus

III. CONCLUSION

The wood carving, stone carving, and colored drawing art in Wushi Temple, through the different forms and decoration method, convey the simple prayer of people that they wish their descendants extend continuously and keep continuity of a clan, and wish their children can have loyalty, filial piety, abstinence and righteousness, and wish their children can have abilities to make prosperity of family. Even though the wishes have a clear class mark and the small farmer's way of thinking, and although it is located in the remote mountain area, the splendor radiates from the wood carving, stone carving, colored drawing decoration art in the ancestral temple. Under the natural spoilage over one hundred years and the artificial damage during the Cultural Revolution, the decorations in the ancestral temple have been scarce increasingly, especially the colored drawings on the exterior wall fade gradually and even fall off after the erosion of the wind and rain, which needs a urgent retrieval and maintenance.

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