

Belief Space Creation of Wu's Ancestral Hall*

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Abstract—Wu's ancestral hall, the First ancestral hall in Eastern Hubei Province, is one of the best-preserved ancient ancestral temples discovered at present, and it is known as the "Hubei Folk Art Treasury". This article focuses on the description of Wu's ancestral hall space, and expounds the influence of geomancy geomantic omen (feng shui), ancestral idea, and architectural technique on the belief space creation of Wu's ancestral hall.

Keywords—Wu's ancestral hall; space culture; space creation

I. WU'S ANCESTRAL HALL

Wu's ancestral hall is located in Doushan Yuan, Baliwan Doushan Village, Hong'an County. Doushan Yuan is embraced on three sides by mountains and embedded with pond and rocks, where is also the Crescent Lake, the scenery is beautiful, the environment is pleasant, and the land is fertile. Doushan and Bamboo Hill extend along the southwest and southeast respectively, like two giant dragons playing the Zhushan in the northeast that is like a pearl, this place is a valuable land with a good geomantic omen. With the Wu's ancestral hall as the boundary, the village houses are divided into eastern and western parts, both of which lean against steep hills and face pond. The layout and orientation of the village houses is intricately concordant with the landform as well as the valley and brook, reflecting the wisdom of the ancients in making a site selection with integration of human and nature, and the concept of full respect for the natural environment.

It has been more than 660 years since formation of the village. The surname of all men in the village is Wu. With a clear seniority order, Tushanyuan has been passed 26 centuries.

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The dwellings here are one of the best-preserved ancient architectural complexes discovered in the east area of Hubei Province, which has reserved a large number of traditional ancient dwellings of Ming and Qing Dynasties with similar forms and distinctive features. According to the survey, the relatively-intact-preserved ancient buildings in Tushanyuan covers about 85% village's building area. One of the representative buildings was called "the Wu's Temple", which was built in 1763 (28th year of QianLong Dynasty), with an area of 3,000 square meters and a building area of 1,410 square meters.

According to the Wu's genealogical records, the Wu's ancestral temple was jointly built in the 28th year of Qing Dynasty, Qianlong period by all clansmen. The two constructions have suffered the fire twice. Until the third time, in 1902, under the two brothers' launching, the whole village raised funds. After two years, the Wu's ancestral temple was completed and was preserved until today.

Most of villagers perform sacrificial activities in the Wu's ancestral temple. It is a place in the clan that is used to commemorate ancestors, hold a meeting and punish the children and clansmen who make a mistake. In the village, the clan leader has the supreme majesty and power. Until today, the aged venerable people still have certain authority and speaking right.

The Wu's ancestral temple carries the belief of clansmen in the blood relatives and good life.

II. CREATION OF BELIEF SPACE

The status of ancestral temple in the whole clan is unshakable. The Wu's ancestral temple is very particular about its site selection. From geomantic omen, it is surrounded by rives and hills and the space before the door is open and flat, and there are two red maples on the left and right sides respectively. The ancestral temple is located in the middle of

the village, and the dwellings are scattered around the ancestral temple.

Open space around the ancestral temple provides a place for daily activities, and large-scale activities and ceremonies on holiday. This is the most silent but boisterous place.

As for the building parts of the ancestral temple, the overall layout of the space is tightly arranged into the forms of three-entry two-veranda and one-entry multiple-veranda based on the standard of the ancestral hall. The trio-building is separated by the courtyard and connected as a whole by veranda. The functions of the three parts are clearly divided, forming a spatial sequence of decorated archway in the front, hall in the middle and deep house in the back (as shown in the “Fig. 1” and “Fig. 2”).

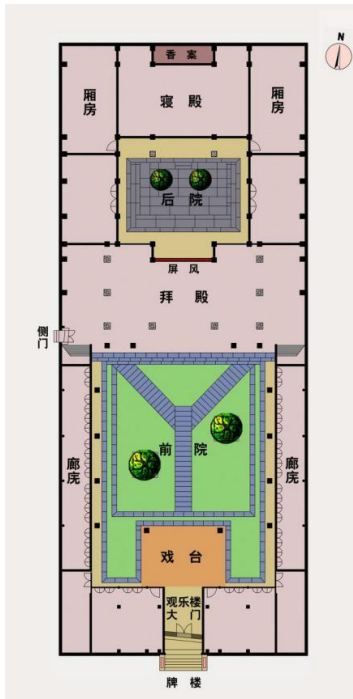


Fig. 1. Ground floor plan of ancestral temple.

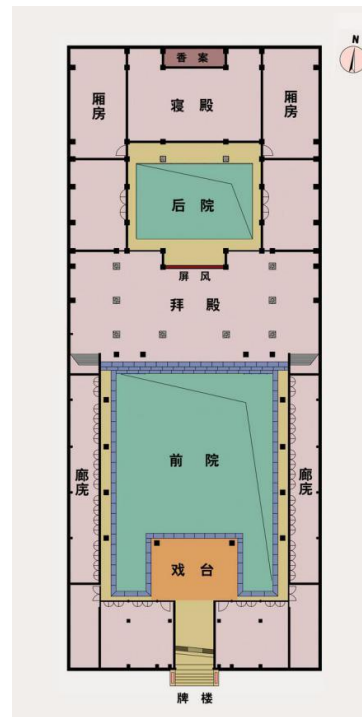


Fig. 2. Second floor plan of ancestral temple.

When stepping into the gate, the first at the sight is the u-shaped “Guanle Building”, higher than two floors. It is divided into the front building and the left and right sides of the building, which are mainly used for recreational activities. The volume of “Guanle Building” is large and is the key parts in the architectural complex. (as shown in the “Fig. 3” and “Fig. 4”).



Fig. 3. Guanle Building.



Fig. 4. Front courtyard of Guanle Building.

The two-storey veranda encloses a spacious front courtyard between Guanle Building and the upper floor of ancestral temple. Walking through the front courtyard, at the second step, we will reach the upper temple of the ancestral temple, which is also the central part of the ancestral temple, prayer temple (as “Fig. 5” and “Fig. 6”). The front part of prayer temple hall is supported by 30 columns, light and spacious. There is a baffle screen in the middle part, with a height of about 5m. The portraits of the ancestors are affixed to the baffle, and the altar that is full of offer sacrifices to ancestors is placed in front of the portrait. Taking altar as the axis, the round-backed armchairs are arranged on both sides. All important matters related the clan or weddings and funerals will be decided here. Therefore, when it comes to holidays, sacrificial rituals, the prayer temple is the most boisterous place.



Fig. 5. The indoor of prayer temple.



Fig. 6. Front courtyard of prayer temple.

Walk backwards, and pass through the backyard with two old prune trees, you can come to the bedroom. This place was used for the elders to discuss official business and rest in the past.

The carved windows on the both sides of wing-room of the bedroom have four carved Chinese characters, “Yu (fishing)”, “Qiao (cutting firewood)”, “Geng (ploughing)” and “Du (reading)” in rapid cursive style of writing. The sun shield is built outside of handrail on the second floor of wing-room and supported by the holder, and it is flexible to be used. So, the ventilation and sun-shading of wing-room can be achieved. Meanwhile, the interspace can guarantee the needs of day lighting in the room, so as to make the room be full of lighting and air. (as shown in “Fig. 7”).



Fig. 7. The courtyard of the palace.

The houses in the bedroom are built with double-deck structure, and the closed periphery forms the courtyard. In rainy days, the rainwater flows into the courtyard from four directions, and the structure of this courtyard in China is called “Si Shui Gui Tang”. Beneath the superficial flagstones of the courtyard, there is a layer of aerial drainage channel. The central terrain is slightly higher than the surrounding and the periphery of courtyard is arranged the closed conduit with copper cash pattern. When it rains, the rainwater flows into the courtyard from the roof and then scatters into the surrounding closed conduit, finally, it is discharged along the under-drain. Such drainage method is scientific, economical, and very practical, and also means that “the property will not flow out”.

III. INFLUENCE FACTORS OF BELIEF SPACE

A. Feng Shui

Feng shui is the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. It is a technique of observing and choosing matching land, with the hope that the treasured land will bring fortune to the area. Therefore, feng shui itself carries a belief and sustenance of “better” and “correct” things, and the feng shui of an ancestral temple is considered to be the key to the rise and fall of a clan.

Wu’s Ancestral Temple was sited by a legend. There was an eye-catching large maple tree at the entrance to the Ancestral Temple. According to legend, one day, this prosperous maple tree suddenly withered for no reason, which shocked the Wu’s Clan, for they did not know what bad omen it was. However, ten years later, a new maple tree suddenly emerged from the roots of dead tree. The growth speed was astonishing. The foliage was lush and the trunks were as thick as a bucket. The villagers thought it was auspiciousness and the area was rich in blessings.

Viewing the position of the Wu’s Ancestral Temple in the village from a macro perspective (as shown in “Fig. 8”), it backs onto a mountain and faces a creek, located at the foot of a hillock in the south of Mount Zhuowang. The Daoshui river is separated from Doushan Village by the mountain, and the Tianzi water ditch and reservoir is located at northwest of the village. With dragon water coming from the Qian-side, a small creek runs across in front of the main entrance of the Ancestral Temple. There are large tracts of fertile land in front of the Ancestral Temple and the horizon is open and wide.

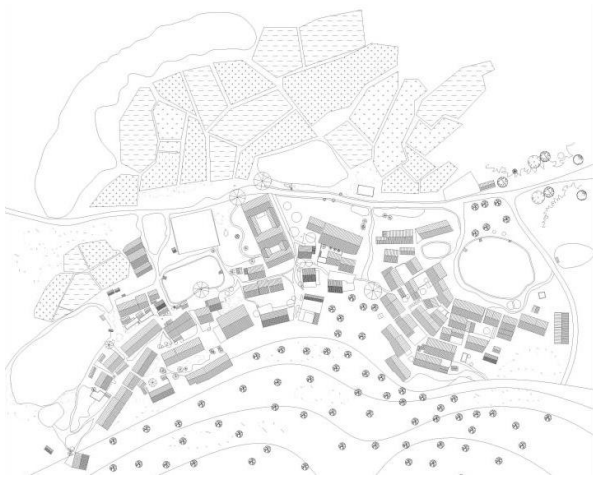


Fig. 8. Overall Layout of the Village.

According to the traditional theory of feng shui, this place is exactly “there is flowing water on the left, which is called the Dragon; there is a long road on the right, which is called the White Tiger; there is a dirty pond in the front, which is called the Suzaku; there is a hill in the back, which is called the Basalt; it is the most valuable place.”¹ There is indeed no shortage of people who have won fame in this village, and there are also many successful merchants who go out to business.

From a microscopic perspective, Wu’s Ancestral Temple has installed a cocked door. There are two doors to the entrance of the Ancestral Temple. One door sits on a hole for the seam of Ren-Zi border, and the other door for the small space of Ren-Hai. The design of this cocked door is actually based on the opinion of feng shui master, and its intention is to facilitate the collection of the southwest water.

The memorial archway of Wu’s Ancestral Temple is very tall and eye-catching, which is also related to feng shui. The entrance to the Ancestral Temple is more prominent than the surrounding buildings. It is said that this method can make people full of yang. Together with the red maple trees growing on the left and right of the entrance, it seems that there are two guards protecting the Ancestral Temple.

Feng shui is an indispensable reference factor for the site selection and construction of traditional buildings, and it means even more for the Clan’s Ancestral Temple as a core building in traditional village. Stand in Wu’s Ancestral Temple to see the hall; it is flat, open, and beautiful with no evil spirit. However, due to the development of society, a new high-voltage steel pole has been erected in front of the Ancestral Temple, which is considered inappropriate in feng shui. Therefore, many villagers have expressed their dissatisfaction and helplessness.

B. Ancestral Idea

Clan is a civil society organization structure. It uses the kinship as a link and the patrilineal clan as its veins to show

the social structure system between kinsfolks and uses power to maintain the operation of the entire clan.

The people in the Central Plains are deeply influenced by the Confucianism and honor the rituals of Zhou Gong. The moral principles are often the code of conduct and belief in their lives. Therefore, concept of clan is constantly strengthened. The establishment of the Ancestral Temple is based on the clan blood. Through the dedication and worship of the ancestors, strengthen the clan's cohesion, centripetal force, in order to seek the vigorous development of the clan.

The villagers in Dousshanyuan Village are Han nationality and all their family names are Wu.

The Wu family enshrined the tablets of the main ancestors in the middle of the hall of worship in the Ancestral Temple, and the burning incense continued for years. For over 600 years, Wu clan people have retained traditional worship culture. Every year on the Chinese New Year Eve, the clan people will gather in the Ancestral Temple for staying-up. During the Qingming Festival, they will worship the ancestors, kneel and burn incense. When the assembly is called upon, the offspring of Wu family will get together to light fireworks and play music, read the funeral oration papers, and offer sacrifices to the ancestors and perform the prostration ceremony and so on.

The creation of clan concept for belief space is embodied in the creation of rights space. The clan is a grassroots social organization and clan society has its own independent and complete structural system. Its main function lies in the management of clan affairs, family affairs and external affairs. The starting point and responsibility for its establishment lies in strengthening the management of the clan and maintaining the interests of the clan, promoting clan development, and making it move forward in an orderly and healthy manner.

The clan is more of a symbol for progressive class relations and power.

The three important architectural structures of the Ancestral Temple are Opera House, Worship Hall and Restroom Hall, which are vertically oriented along the main axis according to their different functions. The space inside the Ancestral Temple is clearly defined and well-ordered, fully reflecting the moral concept of “Ritual first” in traditional Chinese family ethics..

However, these seemingly ordinary sequences of space have great meaning. These different orders all correspond to a different behavioral rule and show a different personal status relationship. The architectural pattern of the Ancestral Temple emphasizes the spatial hierarchy of primary, positive and external, that is, the principle of “pecking order” of ethics. Wu Ancestral Temple, from the Opera House for entertainment to the Worship Hall for ancestral worship and deliberations and to the Restroom Hall for ancestral tablets, from the low to the high, upward orderly and this is the principle of “front low and rear high”.

The spatial order of the Ancestral Temple under the influence of traditional Confucianism is extremely particular.

The “Opera House” is U-shaped. It consists of a front building and two wings on the left and right, surrounded on

¹ [Ming Dynasty] *Ten Papers of Yang House* written by Wang Junrong.

three sides, and the line of sight is open and unobstructed. It is mainly used for entertainment. The clansman can look down from the high to watch opera and song and dance performances. The central area of the front building is dedicated to providing seats for prominent figures such as patriarchs, respectable elders and scholars, occupying the most prominent area of the "Opera House".

The Worship Hall is the core area of Wu Ancestral Temple. Here, the Hall is open and spacious. The painted carved Taishi board chairs are arranged in turn into two rows. There is a carved incense burner table in the center of the Hall, with burning incense and candles for Wu's ancestors all the year round. Ancestor worship is one of the most important functions of the Ancestral Temple. Therefore, as the main site for the worship of ancestors, the Worship Hall is large and bright, finely decorated.

At the same time, the Worship Hall is also served as a place for deliberations in the Ancestral Temple. Only majestic dignified patriarchs are eligible to participate.

Another aspect of the manifestation of clan power lies in the punishment of the clansman. The clan of Huizhou region ("Fig. 9") has an important ritual in punishing its people: the perpetrator is escorted from the left door of the Ancestral Temple, and he kneels down in front of the hall. If he is punished by expulsion or other more severe punishment, the person will be taken out of the Ancestral Temple, from the left door to take the homonym of the "left door," meaning "being expelled", meaning that he will be expelled from the family; in other cases, the person will be taken out from the right door of the Ancestral Temple. There is also a left door in the "Worship Hall" of Wu's Ancestral Temple ("Fig. 10").

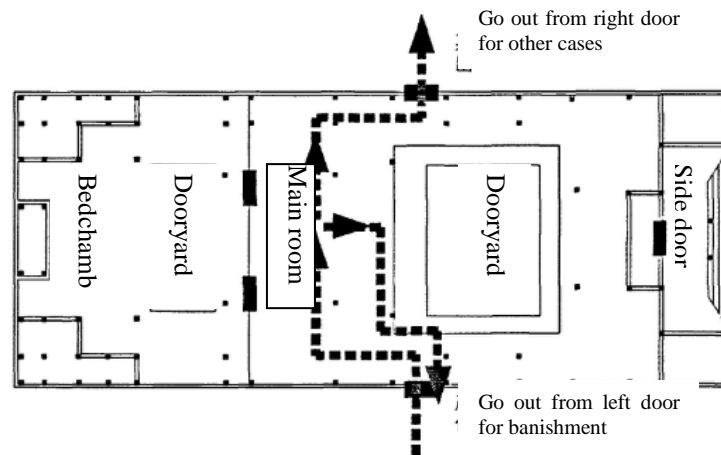


Fig. 9. Ancestral Temple of Huizhou.

Go further in the back and you will come to the Restroom Hall, which is the most important part of the Ancestral Temple. It was used in the past as a place for rest after deliberations and for small-scale deliberations by dignified members of the family and it was also the place where the ancestral tablets were enshrined. The room where the tablets are enshrined occupies the largest area, and there is enough space in the front for the family members to worship. On the base of the building, the Worship Hall and the Restroom Hall are higher than the Opera House in the front, showing that the ancestors are placed in the highest position and their respect for the ancestors. The overall layout of the building presents high and low buildings with clear subordination and order.

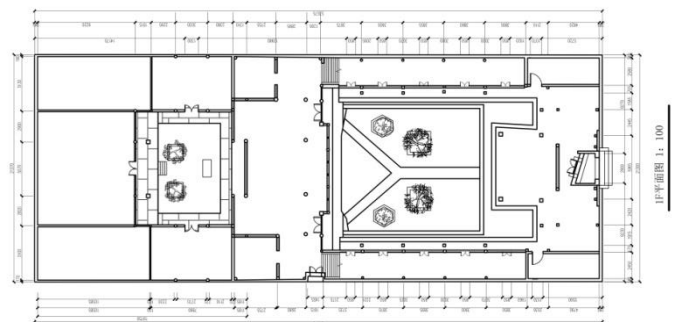


Fig. 10. Wu's Ancestral Temple.

C. Architectural Technique

Wu's Ancestral Temple is valued as "Hubei folk art treasure". The entire ancestral hall is exquisitely made under the restoration of the joint force of the clansman.

The ancestral temple has a traditional structure of brick, stone and wood. Because the construction of traditional residential buildings is often limited by traditional system and affected by traditional culture, the selection of materials and colors tend to be based on the concept of "elegant nature" in

Confucianism. Therefore, the color of buildings in the Temple is mostly the origin tinct of brick and wood. Moreover, because it enshrines an array of forefathers, the ancestral temple should be a solemn and majestic place and doesn't suitable for too bright colors. So, the building color of Wu's Ancestral Temple is mainly centered on the azury, white, and red ones.

But the seemingly ordinary materials and the color uses call for careful study in the Wu's Ancestral hall.

The hall's builders are not pushovers but the most famous local Shaw stonemason team in those days and the famous carpenter group known in Hubei and Hunan, "Huang filial organized group". "Huang filial organized group" only serves to Wu's ancestral hall at Hong'an County. The materials used by Wu's ancestral hall are also customized with the best stones, bricks, etc. and each piece of azury brick is specifically stamped with the words "Wu's temple" to prevent misappropriation. At that time, there was no cement slurry. So, the craftsmen always used glutinous rice paste mixed with lime to produce cement-like, and its condensing power was far better than today's ordinary cement.

Wu's ancestral halls is made of fine bricks, wood and stone with self-characteristics, making the building of the ancestral hall stately and enjoy the dignity of the local clan.

The two-storey "view music building" is entirely built by the wooden structure. In the courtyard below "view music building", azury bricks pave completely the blank and flat space surrounded by osmanthus tree. At the joint of the corridors columns, intervals with the woodcarving flowery board are set. After setting foot on the second stone ladder, people can see that Baidian, Qindian are all made of pure wood structure building. They have uniform style, but the details are full of patterns.

Just standing at the entrance of the ancestral hall, we can see the "Eight Diagrams and Tai Chi maps" on the roof of the "view moon building". Although it has been over a century, the lines of the pattern are still clear and the color is still gorgeous. The Eight Diagrams on the murals of the roof is composed of black and red painting, representing the traditional Yin and Yang, just as the fish revolve around each other clockwise. Eight Diagrams comes from the practice of ancient Chinese people that look up at the heaven and look down at the earth, which means that the whole Wu family comply with nature and hopes to bless later clansman by means of the forces of all things of nature. Outside the Eight Diagrams, there are also eight paintings with the legendary figure and each painting corresponds to the each clockwise direction, which signifies that good luck converges here from eight directions. This place is almost the most brightly colored place in the ancestral hall, adding a breath of liveliness to the solemn shrine ("Fig. 11").



Fig. 11. The fresco on top of the wall in "view music building".

All the workmanship of the "view month building" is very fastidious. On the whole, it is made of wood. But about the details of the building, such as roof, beam column and components etc, each of these constructional elements are carefully produced with carved flying dragons and dancing phoenix, flowers, bird figures, and character image.

In Baidian, we can see a golden dragon is tied to the center position of neighbor area of the hall and parvis with thick red copper wire deter evil spirits from all directions. On both sides of the column, there are three-foot high woodcarvings with many carved grapes. The leaves, rattan, whiskers and fruits of the woodcarving are depicted so skillfully. Looking carefully, at the void of huge grape leaf and curly rattan, there is a group of hidden mice with various gestures. All these mice are vivid and they are coveting the lifelike grapes. What's amazing is that these carved mice are like real ones, and they look like so furry that seem to be alive. The entire image forms a picture of the "Mouse and Grapes" ("Fig. 12"). The grape always grows in fruitful manner, while in the zodiac, the mouse is ranked the first one, which greatly match "zi"--the first terrestrial branch. Therefore, this pair of wood carvings have been endowed with a multi-layered meaning of "multiple children more grandchildren, and endless children", fruitful harvest, happiness and longevity. In addition, the walls of the hall are also carved with Phoenix, cranes, kylin, and other exotic animals. These works are of various shapes, skilled knife and wonderful talent and meticulous carving symbolizes the clan's extravagance and strength.



Fig. 12. Mice and Grapes.

On the east and west area of Qindian, there are wing-rooms and every wing-room door is equipped with hollow and carving drum door. On the four doors, the four birdish characters “fishing”, “cockroach”, “cultivation” and “reading” are carved by the craftsmen with extremely exquisite techniques (as “Fig. 13”). These four words are very eye-catching and can be seen in the backyard, and these four words have profound teaching significance. The upper and lower parts of the drum gate are carved with “The Romance of West Chamber”, “Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai”, “Su Xiaomei’s Three Obstacle’s for the Groom” and other literary bachelor’s romantic stories, which is placed a deep hope for the later people on the pursuit of reading and life.



Fig. 13. Qindian.

None of the part of Wu’s Ancestral hall is not carved exquisitely. Each of its works is not for simple decoration and aesthetics and it also shows the infinite faith and emotions that the creator has poured into the ancestral hall and the unlimited expectations and wishes for future generations.

The majestic atmosphere of the space has laid the tone for the temple, which is a place of faith. At the same time, every detail and every exquisite carving also reflects the strength and emotion of the clan, so that the ancestral hall’s space function is more dimensional, and the ancestral hall’s grade increases.

IV. CONCLUSION

Feng Shui originated from the accumulation of experience of ancient Chinese people. Based on a concept, it is the ultimate yearning for a better life. From the layout of the whole village, to the placement of furniture, the choice of people is affected by Feng Shui, trying to improve and guide the life of the present and the future.

The builders of the ancestral hall firmly believe that the location and construction of this way can protect the clans and flourish the later generation, which can be interpreted to a kind of conviction. Although nowadays, the development of science has made a great challenge to Feng Shui, and many theories have been questioned or even eliminated, the roughly thoughts of “man is an integral part of nature” and “the house should sit down on the southern side and face the northern one” are unquestionable. Feng Shui is strongly believed and sent to positive hope, which can be interpreted to a kind of conviction.

The clan is a large collective with blood ties as a link. “Politics in ancient China is family based politics” shows that in the past, to some extent, the patriarchal clan system even more important than the social system. The imperial power or political center is so far from the grass-root unit that sometimes they aren’t able to manage lower-level administrative unit. Against this situation, the clan power in the village is absolute. In turn, the obedience and trust of the villagers to the clan are also absolute, and the trust is a kind of “belief”.

The supremacy of power shows the distinction of rank. Therefore, in the building of the belief space, it will also show the power level, and there will be an absolute division in the architecture and space.

In Wu’s Temple, there are numerous sculpture and painting. All of them are designed by means of careful conception by predecessors. Each of the beautiful works in the hall seems to be just exquisite carvings to decorate with Wu’s Hall and shows the artistic position and strength of the Wu Clan. However, but in fact, each work has a profound meaning. In general, they are all expressing ardent hopes and blessings for the Wu clan. Through these works, the Wu Clan people expressed their “beliefs.”

“Faith” is an affirmative word. Whether it is interpreted emotionally or in itself, it is an unquestionable, absolute expression of emotion. Therefore, the construction of “faith space” must not be vaguely expressed. The purpose and significance must be very clear.

From the above, we can know that whether it is Feng Shui, clan concepts or the exploration of art, the construction of the architectural space environment has an inevitable connection with culture. In order to interpret the connection between the architectural space environment and culture, it is necessary to find the link between the two, and that is the people who are willing to build an architectural space environment. The construction of the belief space corresponds to the people who have this belief.

For thousands of years, people have established ideological concepts in their own thinking activities, which in turn have influenced people’s behavioral activities. What kind of behavioral activities will create what kind of space concept in the environment where people live?

However, due to the “disintegration of the old value system”, changes in the social value system, the advent of new civilization, the rules of the traditional clan society have also been changed. The family ancestral hall supported by the patriarchal system cannot escape the fate of decline. In response, Wu’s ancestral temple obviously has no past prosperity. Although the external space has been fixed, the land of destruction can be repaired as much as possible, and space for belief is still there, the fate of “faith” itself is unknown by people.

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