

Investigation and Exploration of traditional decorative window grills in Northern Jiangxi Province—— taking Heshe ancient village as an example

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Abstract: This paper investigated all kinds of window grille styles in Heshe ancient village, and summarized main characteristics including the themes of different window grille styles. The cultural meaning and structural aesthetic significance, especially the inspiration of their cultural connotations for modern architectural structure aesthetics indicated by these window grilles were also explored.

Keywords: Tradition, Window Grille, Wood Carving, Architectural Decoration, Cultural Connotation

1. Introduction of Heshe Ancient Village

Heshe village, located in Suxiang town, Duchang County, Jiujiang City, Jiangxi Province, is a famous historical and cultural village in Jiangxi Province which also belongs to the fourth batch of Chinese traditional villages. Since initially built in the Eastern Han Dynasty and gradually expanded in early Ming dynasty, Heshe village has a history of 1,800 years. It was not until the middle of Qing Dynasty when the Yuan family sold porcelains in Jingdezhen and invested in civil construction in their hometown that the current complete village pattern was gradually formed. The village at the very beginning was built on a mountain, located in the northeast while facing the southwest. The existing buildings in Heshe village are almost intact buildings built in Ming and Qing dynasties. The houses were built around the wind pool and arranged neatly in the center of the main hall. The layout of the building generally in a typical residential architecture style in Qing dynasty was well-proportioned on the basis of local conditions, creating an ancient and quiet atmosphere. Every two doors in the house were opened to each other, and all passageways were made of hemp stone, so that even on rainy days the roads would not become muddy. Between two residential houses, the screen head is stacked and the tail of the phoenix flies up, with a typical Hui style.

As the clan culture is the core of traditional village, Heshe village which was dominated by the Yuan family had formed a rich clan culture for long a time in history. In the family clan, both daily affairs and important decisions such as offering sacrifices, repairing genealogy, supporting the poor families, and opening schools, need to be decided through consultations within the clan, which reflected the absolute authority of the clan. Nowadays, important activities including weddings, funerals, and acting during annual festivals would be held in Yuan's ancestral hall. And the villagers' meetings, receptions of guests and external displaying activities were also held there, and in this scenario the ancestral temple undertake the function of giving rewards and punishments and spreading education to the villagers. In this way, the clan culture would be inherited and carried forward with the ancestral temple as the carrier.

Cultivation and education are the essence of cultural inheritance in Heshe village. Ancestors of Heshe village all emphasized the importance of education and they wished that the future generations of their family could dedicate into education so as to honor their ancestors. In the middle of the Qing Dynasty, the Yuan family operated large-scale porcelain production and sales business in Jingdezhen, but they had never forgot the tradition of Confucianism as they attached great importance to education and set up the Huanxiang Zhai school house. During the period of the Republic of China, eighteen general officers came from Huanxiang Zhai. From then on, the reputation of the Yuan family both in civil and military aspects spread a hundred miles away.

2. The origin of the architectural wood carving decoration in Heshe ancient Village

Most of the village houses were built in the Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China. In addition, there also existed a few buildings built in late Ming Dynasty. In the middle of Qing Dynasty, with the great prosperity of the porcelain business in Jingdezhen, lots of ancestral halls, academies and memorial archways were built. The ancestral hall dwellings in Heshe village followed the architectural form of Wuyuan houses since Jingdezhen is adjacent to Wuyuan which then belonged to the Greater Huizhou area and the Hui-style dwellings in Wuyuan were famous for their elegant style and exquisite craftsmanship.

In middle and late Qing Dynasty, Hui-style dwellings were “carved without carving while carving is very precious”. For thousands of years, the craftsmen had gradually explored and formed the traditional carving techniques with a wide range of carving themes and carving forms such as wood carving, stone carving, and brick carving, etc. The carvings in the dwellings all exhibited the cultivation of the house owner, the cultural inheritance and wisdom of the craftsmen, which all attached great vitality to the wood. Traditional culture and art are directly reflected in residential buildings, and the development and evolution of culture have been passed from generation to generation up to now. The wood carving art in Ming and Qing Dynasties is the most brilliant form of carving and the wood carving art of Heshe Village is the embodiment of this brilliant period. It not only has rich cultural connotations, but also has exquisite but practical decorations, giving people a high visual enjoyment. At the same time, because of the profound regional cultural heritage, the wood-carving architecture in Heshe ancient village gives off a vibe of both wealth and elegance.

3. Wood window grille of Heshe ancient village

3.1 Classification of wood window grilles in Heshe ancient village

Wood window grilles in Heshe village can be divided into solid wood carving and hollow-out carving.

Solid wood carving is similar to wood painting since both of them are painting on woods with knives. Solid wood carving of flower window panels in Heshe ancient village is a form of art which covers the composition, theme, knife method and other aspects of wood painting. It is usually carved on a whole piece of wood which according to different sizes, is generally used to build doors, window aprons, sash ring plate and the center of open carving decorations.

Hollow-out carving aims mainly to increase ventilation and lighting and are generally used for doors, windows and other places. It usually adopts the form of penetrating carving and tenon splicing, which can not only reduce the complexity of the carving process, improve the utilization rate of materials, but also perfectly demonstrate the art of carving.



Figure 1. Examples of solid wood carving.



Figure 2. Examples of Hollow-out carving.

3.2 Theme of wood carving and flower windows in Heshu Ancient Village

The wood carving in Heshu village exhibited a wide range of themes and exquisite ideas, from nature, landscape, flowers, figures, animals like insects and fish to ancient textures and auspicious patterns. Since the middle of Qing dynasty, the decorative pattern of the wooden windows in Heshu village had not only inherited the traditional themes such as flowers, animals and auspicious patterns, but also integrated more carving elements with humanistic characteristics, such as characters, stories, operas and historical allusions. This inheritance and innovation reflected that the house owners attached more importance to the clan culture, cultivation and education in this period, a typical phenomenon among Confucian scholars.

3.3 Features of wood-carving windows in Heshu ancient village

The wood-carving windows of Heshu ancient village inherited the themes and cultural connotations of Hui-style wood carving and kept the rugged artistic style. Meanwhile, because of the special geographical location of Heshu village, the wood-carving windows there were not as good as the fine and gorgeous Jiangsu and Zhejiang wood carvings, nor as good as the wood

carving of abstract nature in northern Fu Jian province. However, influenced by the local culture in northern Jiangxi, the wood carving of Heshe ancient village presented a unique style of simplicity and solitary self-appreciation.

3.4 Wood-carving flower windows with mortise and tenon skills

The wood carving windows of Heshe ancient village adopted complex mortise and tenon structures, especially flower windows and lattice windows. According to different pattern structures, different mortise and tenon connections were adopted, such as flat tenon, diagonal tenon, corner tenon, single tenon, double tenon, string tenon, etc. Rectangular window lattice used more string tenons; ice sheet grain window lattice only used inclined tenon. Compared with other carved window lattices, inclined tenon with the advantages like saving materials, uneasy to be deformed and strength improvement, was widely used.

4. Cultural meaning of wood carving in He she Ancient Village

4.1 Confucianism

On the separable gates of houses in Heshe ancient village, there are delicate wood carvings on the top of these separable gates. There are wood carvings themed as plums, orchids, bamboos, chrysanthemum and other plants carrying good wishes in the middle of the upper end. Some of these carvings together with carved vases were designed to express the house owners' wishes for safety and peace, specifically wishes that the male bread winners of the family who are doing businesses far away from home would be safe. There are a large number of plant-themed carvings on the flower windows in Heshe ancient village. Spring orchid, summer lotus, autumn chrysanthemum and winter plum were carved to symbolize the master's noble character and aesthetic orientation since these plants had always been the metaphor of social moral norms in traditional culture.

4.2 Loyalty, filial piety and righteousness

In the flower windows of Heshe ancient village, the theme of loyalty, filial piety and righteousness was everywhere. The legends of filial piety, such as Deer milk served for parents and Child as a gift from heaven, reflected the clan culture of Passing on the family blood. The theme of Confucianism and political career in the government like Getting the first place in the imperial examination and Announcement of success in the imperial examination, Study hard despite of poverty, Home returning with wealth and honor and other topics, reflected the simple thought of flourishing study and prosperous political career. These are the most essential characteristics of Confucianism, and the influence of Confucian culture on the art of flower window-carving in Heshe ancient village was quite obvious.

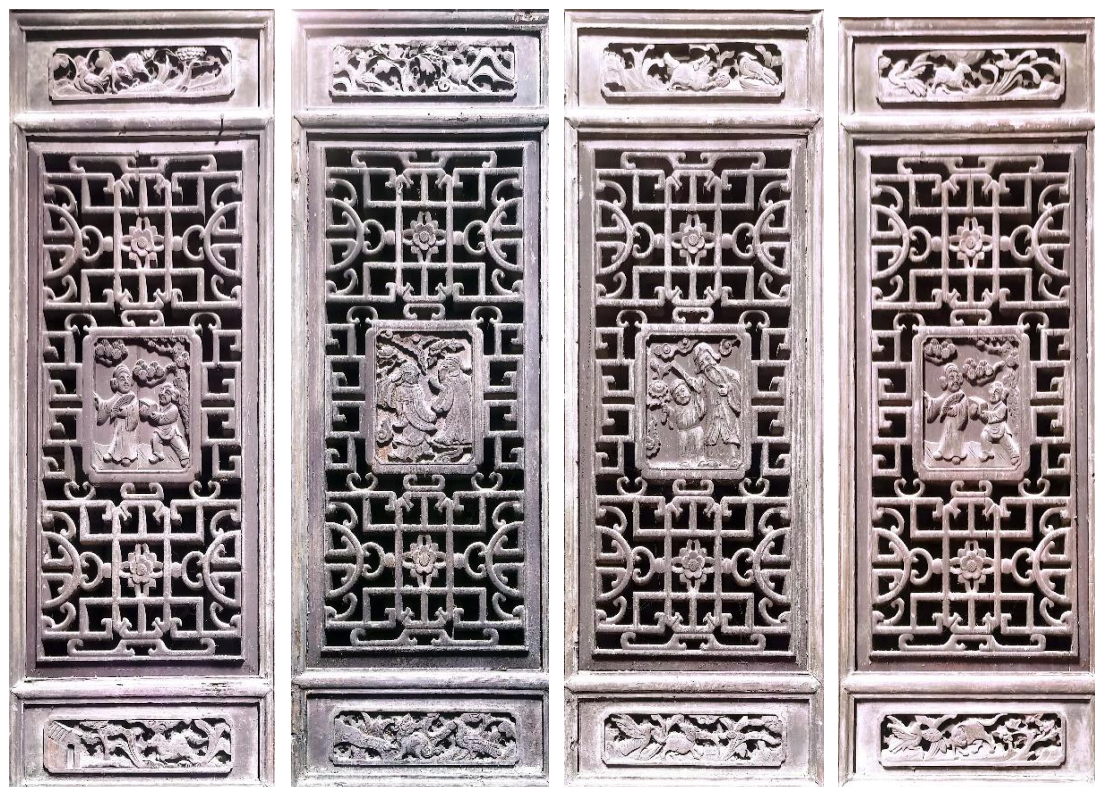


Figure 3. Example of windows in Heshe ancient village

4.3 Auspicious meaning

When people were in lack of material life, they used to have a very strong spiritual pursuit of festival and auspiciousness. The flower windows of houses in Heshe ancient village usually composes an outer frame, a sash ring plate, a lattice center and flower patterns on the lattice. Usually there are various delicate patterns of flowers, cloud, palindromes, etc., on the lattice center and lattice flowers of the flower windows. the centripetal pattern embodies good wishes of safe returning, life-long blessings and good luck. These auspicious wood carvings with enriched traditional beauty reflected the diversity of society and people's good wishes at that time.

4.4 Drama and Literature

Meanwhile, in the profound nurturing of Confucianism, there are also themes like Strive to be a civil servant by hard working, Family filial piety and national loyalty and Principles of mean and harmony. There were also popular operas, lyric books, fairy tales, celebrity anecdotes and other literary symbols. This kind of landscape pictures were in line with the theme of traditional stories was very common in the carved sash ring plates for window decoration, such as the poetry works Home-Coming, Song of a Pipa Player, literary works Romance of the Western Chamber, Romance of the Three Kingdoms and opera works Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea and Biography of Liu Yi.

5. Conclusion

The wood carving of Heshe ancient village highlighted the beauty of the natural texture of wood, by taking the expression and symbolic metaphor of images as the creative guiding idea. As the main way to highlight the artistic characteristics of wood carving in local dwellings, it also highlighted the simplicity principle. The art was mainly a dynamic planting mixture of auspicious decorations and drama narratives with a far-reaching influence. It has become a typical symbol of traditional culture in northern Jiangxi. The artistic content of wood carving in Heshe ancient village presents

its own unique style, which fully demonstrated the popularity of Confucianism and people's traditional pursuits for good luck and disaster disappearance in the culture of northern Jiangxi province.

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