

Study on the Characteristics and Cultural Value of Brick Carving in Shanxi Jinzhong Dwellings

Pingping Su^{1*}

¹ College of Art and Design, Inner Mongolia University of Science and Technology, Baotou, Inner Mongolia, China

Email Address

2645113695@qq.com (Pingping Su)

*Correspondence: 2645113695@qq.com

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Abstract:

Brick carving in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province, as an intangible cultural heritage that condenses local skills, culture and spirit, has a high value of humanities and art research, and is still the main form of residential decoration in some areas of China. With the opening of mechanization and intelligence, the traditional art has no successors, and this unique decorative art is gradually dying out. In order to further expand the storage of traditional cultural theories and lay a theoretical research foundation. This paper analyzes the cultural research value of Shanxi Jinzhong residential brick carving from the aesthetic point of view, and sorts out the characteristics of residential brick carving, thus prolonging the vitality of brick carving development.

Keywords:

Jinzhong, Shanxi, Brick Carving of Residential Buildings, Artistic Features, Cultural Connotation

1. Introduction

Brick carving is a carving process based on masonry. Craftsmen carve landscapes, flowers, figures and other patterns on blue bricks, and its artistic form and spiritual connotation have been improved and developed in the long years. Brick carving in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province has a long history, and its unique regional culture has created a unique art of brick carving, which is comparable to that of Huizhou brick carving and enjoys the praise of “Southern Hui and Northern Jin”. Brick carvings of dwellings in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province contain a beautiful vision and status display in people's lives, endowing dwellings with rich cultural connotations, and their research has high historical and artistic value. At present, there are few summative research materials on the direction of brick carving in Shanxi, which hinders the modernization of brick carving. Therefore, a comprehensive study of brick carving in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province is imminent.

2. Shanxi Jinzhong Residential Brick Carving Overview

2.1 The Historical Context of Brick Carving in Dwellings

Brick carving, as a unique artistic expression, is closely related to people's thoughts and beliefs. People turn their expectations for the future and beautiful stories into exquisite patterns, and then skilled craftsmen integrate their designs and ideas into buildings, thus meeting people's aesthetic needs for residential buildings. Brick carving first appeared in the Shang and Zhou Dynasties more than 3,000 years ago, and the floor tiles of the late Shang Dynasty were unearthed in Fufeng County, Shaanxi Province. The more standardized process and production technology in Qin dynasty made brick carving have a qualitative leap. From the Spring and Autumn Period to the Han Dynasty, the ruling class became popular in tombs, and brick carving was widely used in the decoration of tombs, represented by portrait bricks and stone in the Han Dynasty. During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, people were obsessed with the power of Taoism and Buddhism in pursuit of immortality, so brick carving was applied to pagodas and temples. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, due to the rapid development of Shanxi merchants and the spread of Confucianism, the traditional hierarchical concept became weak, and brick carving began to move from tombs and patriarchal buildings to residential buildings. In this period, brick carving became the main form of residential buildings. This kind of decoration not only evaded the constraints of the imperial power system, but also showed personal financial resources through the styles and materials of brick carving. With the impact of modern western culture, geometric high-rise buildings have further compressed the living space of brick carving, and the art of brick carving has gradually declined.

2.2 Shanxi Jinzhong residential brick carving development

Shanxi Province is located in the border area between Shanxi and Mongolia, and its unique geographical position has created a blend of multi-ethnic cultures. Since the government opened the border ban policy in the Ming Dynasty, the border line between Shanxi and Mongolia has changed from a small-scale thoroughfare in the Qin Dynasty to a relatively standardized commercial line [1]. Influenced by geographical location and policies, most Shanxi people choose to do business, so Shanxi merchants develop rapidly. Influenced by the traditional concept of "getting rich by the end, keeping it by the root", most of the rich Shanxi merchants returned to their homes. In order to show their achievements in returning to their hometowns, Shanxi merchants will renovate their homes, and the brick carvings that are not restricted by grades and are very beautiful will enter the public's field of vision. With the development of modern society and the rise of urbanization, the demand for brick carving has increased, and many excellent carving craftsmen have appeared. In a specific historical environment, the art of brick carving has entered the peak stage of "letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend" and reached the peak stage in artistic attainments.

3. Shanxi Jinzhong Residential Brick Carving Characteristics

3.1. Shanxi Jinzhong residential brick carving theme

Brick carving decoration is a kind of plastic art with visual and tactile feelings. In the process of creation, we should not only consider the sense of order of decorative

content, but also arrange decorative content reasonably according to the law of formal beauty, so as to achieve a high degree of unity of form and content of decorative art beauty and a decorative atmosphere full of life [2]. Geographically, Shanxi is a relatively closed area as well as the border area between Han and Mongolia. Due to the location, Shanxi's brick carvings are different in both north and south styles and styles in the province. Brick carving styles in Shanxi Province can be divided into three schools: Jinnan, Jinzhong and Jinbei. Jinnan region is adjacent to Shaanxi, which is dominated by farming civilization. Under the influence of Shaanxi culture, the theme of brick carving in Jinnan region is mainly plant patterns.

The northern part of Shanxi is adjacent to Mongolia, and Mongolia attaches great importance to nomadic culture. For a long time, the theme of brick carving in northern Shanxi mostly uses animal patterns. Jinzhong region is the central region with a strong commercial atmosphere, and its patterns are also closely related to Ottawa's business. The theme of brick carving in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province can be roughly divided into four categories: natural scenery, social life, text patterns and mythical images.

In terms of natural scenery, despite the strong commercial atmosphere in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province, the traditional class culture of "intellectuals, farmers and businessmen" still exerts a subtle influence on people's aesthetic trend, and most descendants of businessmen will be guided to "win fame and honor their ancestors", so the brick carving culture in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province is closely related to Confucianism. In terms of natural theme selection of brick carving, Jinzhong area in Shanxi Province mostly chooses plants with good cultivation and tough quality, such as plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum, which symbolize "pride, quietness, firmness and lightness" (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Diagram of Plum Orchid, Bamboo and Chrysanthemum.

Note: The picture comes from the Internet, the same below.

In terms of social life, constrained by the rulers of dynasties and the system respected by thoughts, people consciously formed a set of ethics and living culture to maintain social order. Since the imperial examination broke the shackles of class, the employment system, regardless of family background, has enabled the children of bureaucrats or those from poor families to be selected as high schools to show their ambition and protection. In the long run, "officials are expensive and people are cheap" will be deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. Residents in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province believe that only by gaining fame can they realize their lofty ideals and realize their self-worth in secular society, so they often choose brick carving patterns such as "winning the championship with five sons" and adding officials to the ranks (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Five-child champion map.

In writing patterns, Confucian culture still guides the development of Shanxi Jinzhong residential construction, and its gentleman thought not only affects people's behavior but also guides the formation of their character. Residents in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province, have two kinds of choices of writing patterns: one is the one with the educational function of "benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom and trust", and the other is the one that expresses their longing for the future. People think that "wealth can't be lewd, power can't be bent, poverty can't be moved", and people born with wealth can't bully others by their status. It is necessary to serve others with morality as a gentleman's trip, so they will choose some words with positive energy in the choice of brick carving patterns to standardize people's words and deeds. In terms of good wishes, people choose some words that symbolize good things in this world, such as blessing, wealth, longevity, happiness and wealth. Besides, Jinzhong, Shanxi Province will also choose some literati poems, allusions and couplets. People use different calligraphy fonts and expressions according to their own identity and preferences, and apply these patterns to the decoration of residential houses (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Text Brick Carving.



Figure 4. Three-star map of Fu Lushou.

The development of traditional society leads to different economic levels, thus forming different levels of social groups. When the poor people at the bottom of society deeply feel that this situation cannot be changed, their spirit is facing collapse. In this situation, Confucian ethics and the theory of the cycle of good and evil have changed this situation. Ethical education has made people believe in fate and seek

faith to achieve the effect of changing fate. People carve fairy tales such as Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea, Guan Yu Guan Gong and Fu Lushou Samsung on brick walls. These patterns not only satisfy people's beliefs, but also express Shanxi Jinzhong residents' eager yearning for sincerity, kindness and beauty (Figure 4).

3.2. Shanxi Jinzhong residential brick carving skills

3.2.1. Shanxi Jinzhong residential brick carving production process

Before carving bricks, we should first make bricks based on local clay materials, select fine-grained clay or sludge at the bottom of the river as raw materials, and adopt a unique firing technique to burn mud embryos into raw materials for brick carving with pure texture, moderate hardness and no foaming. Secondly, proofing should be carried out on the fired blue bricks. Generally, there are two methods for brick carving proofing. One is to print the painted design draft on the blue bricks coated with limewater, and the other is to draw the draft directly on the blue bricks and adjust the pattern and layout of the brick carving by itself. Thirdly, brick carving should be done. This procedure is mainly aimed at sketching the pattern of well-made blue bricks, using chisels or carving knives to outline the outline of the pattern, and roughly dividing the layers of brick carving. The last and most important step in the process-thinning, craftsmen use a variety of tools combined with shovel, carving, picking and other techniques to depict the details of brick carving (Figure 5). Only when the working procedures are closely linked can we make unique brick carvings of Jinfeng.

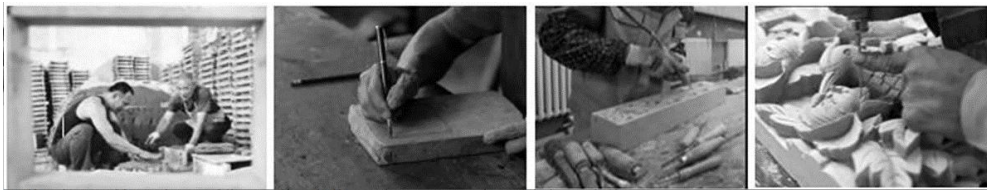


Figure 5. Manufacturing process of brick carving.

3.2.2. Carving Techniques of Brick Carving in Shanxi Jinzhong Dwellings

During the Song Dynasty in China, the folk customs were beautiful, and the production technology of brick carving art was exquisite and the characteristics of production techniques were outstanding. In the Song Dynasty, there was a book called "Building French Style", which wrote: "Its carving and carrying system is four-level: one day, it rises from the ground; Second, pressing the ground to hide China; Third, reduce the ground and forge flat; Four days are plain." This art of carving on blue bricks requires strict processes such as material selection, molding and firing, and only when the quality passes can the next carving work be carried out [3].

The most commonly used carving techniques in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province are line carving, round carving, relief carving and through carving. Line carving refers to the use of tools to depict patterns on objects. This carving process has two manifestations: male carving and female carving. Female carving refers to making concave line patterns on the plane of bricks, and there is no nail "ground" outside the patterns [4]. Round carving is a three-dimensional carving form. By carving all sides of the brick blank, all-round ornamental effect can be achieved. This carving method is often applied to the roof of residential buildings, and the beast on the roof is the embodiment of this technique. Relief is a technique to enhance the layering of brick

carving. Relief techniques can be divided into deep relief and shallow relief. Judging the difference according to the degree of concavity and convexity in the plane, the layering of deep relief can enhance people's depth vision. Through carving is a kind of carving technique between round carving and relief carving. On the basis of relief carving, the background part is further hollowed out to pursue the transparency of decoration. There are two kinds of carving techniques, one is single-sided carving and the other is double-sided carving [5]. The multi-level expression of through carving is beneficial to increase the layering of brick carving patterns. On the other hand, the transparent effect can also form the effect of borrowing scenery, which makes it possible to enjoy the landscape in many aspects and better integrate with the environment.

3.3. Shanxi Jinzhong residential brick carving composition form

3.3.1. Symmetric equilibrium

Influenced by Confucian culture, the residents of Jinzhong, Shanxi Province follow the golden mean, and the artistic form of following the rules is also integrated into brick carving. The folk houses in Jinzhong, Shanxi, respect this art form and pursue symmetry in the composition of brick carvings. The content patterns and house layout complement each other. Taking the decoration position in the courtyard of Shanxi merchants as an example, the brick carving patterns on both sides of the door must be symmetrical, and the obvious balanced art can be seen in the top of the roof and the wall photos in the courtyard. This art of paying attention to echo makes the courtyard of Shanxi merchants look solemn and quiet.

3.3.2. Scattered density

China's aesthetics pays attention to blank space culture. Compared with comprehensive depiction, it pays more attention to the density of decoration, which breaks the regular state in the picture. Brick carving craftsmen arrange different decorative elements in a dense way, making some places have compact patterns, others have loose patterns, and even blank space treatment. This treatment can make viewers naturally produce visual centers without visual fatigue. Taking China's traditional landscape painting as an example, a few strokes outline the theme, and a large margin of blank space can increase people's imagination, which makes the works distinctive and full of charm.

3.3.3. Round place

In ancient science, it was thought that "the sky is round and the place is round", and people thought that everything from scratch was closely related to the energy between heaven and earth, so the ancients thought that "the unity of heaven and man" could conform to the ever-changing laws of nature. Traditional residents in Shanxi integrate this concept into brick carving works, and pay attention to correct and complete composition, with soft lines, giving people a cordial feeling. This patchwork composition method in Fiona Fang makes Shanxi brick carving flexible and changeable, making it a unique cultural heritage.

3.3.4. Combination of reality and reality

Shanxi Jinzhong residence pays great attention to the pattern distribution and composition form of brick carving. Influenced by traditional painting, Shanxi

Jinzhong residence brick carving pays attention to the combination of space and reality. When making brick carving pattern composition, the background is usually left blank to express the sky or water surface. In order to highlight the subject, various carving techniques will be used to portray the subject more delicately. Through this primary and secondary division and dense layout of the picture, the limited space level can be enriched and the overall picture can be harmonious and natural.

4. Shanxi Jinzhong Residential Brick Carving Aesthetic Value

4.1. Visual pursuit

Brick carving, as a derivative of national culture, bears the aesthetic needs of various regions, and brick carving in Jinzhong, Shanxi also contains the unique aesthetic taste in Jinzhong, Shanxi. In terms of carving, the brick carving in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province not only has the beautiful and elegant of southern brick carving, but also has the roughness of northern brick carving. Its finished product carving is exquisite, and the design criterion based on the premise of protecting buildings makes the brick carving practical. The choice of patterns is mainly based on the needs of local life, including flowers and plants, people's stories and calligraphy. Its brick carving is full of interest and adds architectural meaning, which effectively meets the visual pursuit of local people.

4.2. Moral sustenance

Through the in-depth study of Shanxi Jinzhong brick carving, we can find that people have formed a cultural atmosphere of “harmony between man and nature” in long-term practice. The Confucian concept of “harmony between man and nature” emphasizes education and pays attention to human relations. When people embody these cultures in Shanxi brick carving, brick carving patterns, whether in words or fairy tales, create a humanistic atmosphere that is loved and heard. This kind of brick carving not only exists attached to the building, but also reflects the belief and pursuit in Jinzhong area of Shanxi Province [6].

4.3. Cultural transmission

In the long-term hard struggle, people in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province, under the unique mountain culture background, formed the Jinzhong culture which combined clan with Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and formed a unique aesthetic and cultural cognition in the long-term cultural integration. The psychological and behavioral reaction of Jinzhong people in brick carving art is to show people's praise for nature and pursuit of life and spirit on brick carving, so that the house can fully express the aesthetic concept and cultural pursuit of the owner. Brick carving of Jinzhong residential buildings not only acts as the side of architectural decoration, but also shows the traditional cultural heritage of Jinzhong area in Shanxi.

5. Conclusions

Brick carving in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province is the epitome of culture in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province, and it is also an important part of traditional architectural carving art in China. Brick carving has a long history and profound culture. Its development can not be separated from the fertile land of regional culture. While absorbing nourishment, it must also be deeply engraved with regional imprint. Although the brick carving in Jinzhong area of Shanxi Province is influenced by Shanxi brick

carving culture, it also breeds its own decorative characteristics in the long-term cultural development, which has certain historical and cultural value. Under the new economic situation, the future development of brick carving will be more difficult, but under the wave of national cultural self-confidence, the art of brick carving will shine more brightly in generate.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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