

A Study of Gable's Head Decoration in Xiaozhai Village

Jiawei Yang^{1*}

¹ Department of Fine Arts, Jinzhong College, Jinzhong, China

Email Address

acaatyz@163.com (Jiawei Yang)

*Correspondence: acaatyz@163.com

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Abstract:

Xiaozhai Village is a typical traditional village along the ancient post road to Beijing in Jinzhong, Shanxi during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The paper takes the gable's head decoration of the ancient residential buildings in Xiaozhai Village as the main research object. Through fieldwork and analogical analysis, its decorative features, cultural characteristics and regional attributes are summarized and the reasons for its generation are sorted out to provide certain reference for the study of architectural decoration of traditional villages along the ancient post road in Jinzhong.

Keywords:

Xiaozhai Village, Gable's Head Decoration, Ancient Post Road

1. Overview of Xiaozhai Village

Xiaozhai, located in Yuji District, Shanxi, was formerly part of Shitie Town, and was administratively transferred to Wujinshan Town in 2021. The Village is located in the loess hilly area, 19km northeast of Yucicheng on the south bank of the Bailong River (a tributary of the Yellow River Basin) and 17km to the north of the Provincial Highway 216. Bordered by Nanyaotou Village in the northeast and southeast, Longbai Village in the west, Beiyiaodian Village in the southwest, and Hanjiazhai in the north, Xiaozhai Village, with an area of 2.23km², is a relatively complete fortress-style traditional village. [1]

Xiaozhai Village has a special geographical location and military status. The west is Taiyuan Prefecture and the east is Pingding Prefecture. The main villages along the original Jinjing Ancient Post Road (1) basically coincide with the current Provincial Highway 216. The ancient buildings of Xiaozhai Village do not only have local typicality and representativeness, but also have high reference value and research value for the study of the architectural decoration characteristics of traditional villages along the Jinjing Ancient Post Road.

Xiaozhai villagers have now moved to the new village as a whole. The new village is close to the original village site as shown in Figure 1. Not only the original building has not been broken down for renovation, but also the villagers return to the ancestral home from time to time for maintenance. In addition, the village committee regularly maintains and takes care of the public facilities in the Village. Therefore, Xiaozhai Village not only has relatively complete preservation of individual buildings, but also

various functional building types and original village appearance, such as: residences, temples, theaters, fortress walls, roads, wall, gate, etc. There are good research conditions not only for the single buildings at that time, but also for the groups, the relationship between the individual and the group, and the relationship between the group and the landform of the building at that time.

The east gate is the gate of Xiaozhai Village, which is also the main entrance and exit of Xiaozhai Village. Through field investigation, the origin of the village name and the relevant information of local chronicles, Xiaozhai Village should have been surrounded by a wall, and there are still remains of the wall on the east side of the Village. The overall topography of the Village is high in the north and low in the south, and the south, west and north are all deep ravines and dangerous ravines, forming a situation that is easy to defend and difficult to attack. When Xiaozhai Village was originally selected for site repair, it should have been carefully considered from the perspective of security defense and feng-shui theory. (Figure 1)



Figure 1. Relationship between Xiaozhai Village and Original Site.

Xiaozhai Village is mainly run by two main roads from east to west, and the buildings of various functions of residences, temples, theaters and small squares are completely preserved. The house numbers are sorted from east to west from the village gate, and a total of 60 numbers are shown in Figure 2.

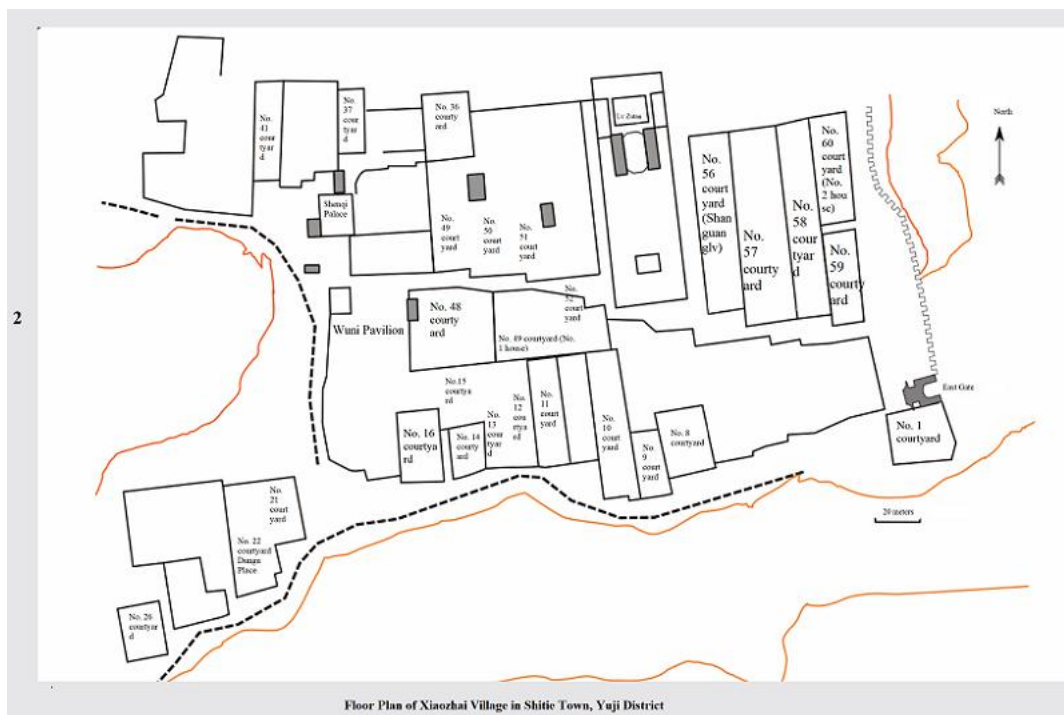


Figure 2. Floor Plan of Xiaozhai Village.

The numbering method is the x number in the door. The meaning of the gate is to take the original gate as the boundary, including inside of the gate and outside of the gate. The architectural decoration of Xiaozhai Village mainly focuses on the following building components, such as roof ridge, eaves tile, gable's head, shadow wall and heaven and earth niche, and this paper takes the architectural decoration of the pier head as the main research object.

2. Gable's Head Decoration of Xiaozhai Village

2.1. Concept of The Gable's Head

Gable's head refers to the corbie gable. The original meaning of the word “xi” is “to paint the ground”, more like a verb than a noun, and it is later evolved into the name of the ground painted with color. This ground is located in front of the step door, the corresponding walls on both sides are “gable's head”, and the outside of the gable's head is often connected with the gable, so the gable's head becomes the head of the gable. [2] During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the structure of the dwellings in the Jinzhong region was relatively unified, and the basic structure was divided into three parts: theme segment, upper body and lower body. The key part of decoration was mainly concentrated in the theme segment. The gable's head decoration is the more decorated and well-preserved parts of the Village, and the decorative patterns are not repeated. The traditional residential buildings in the Jinzhong region usually have courtyard gates, main gables, winghouse gables and second entrance gates, as shown in Figure 3.

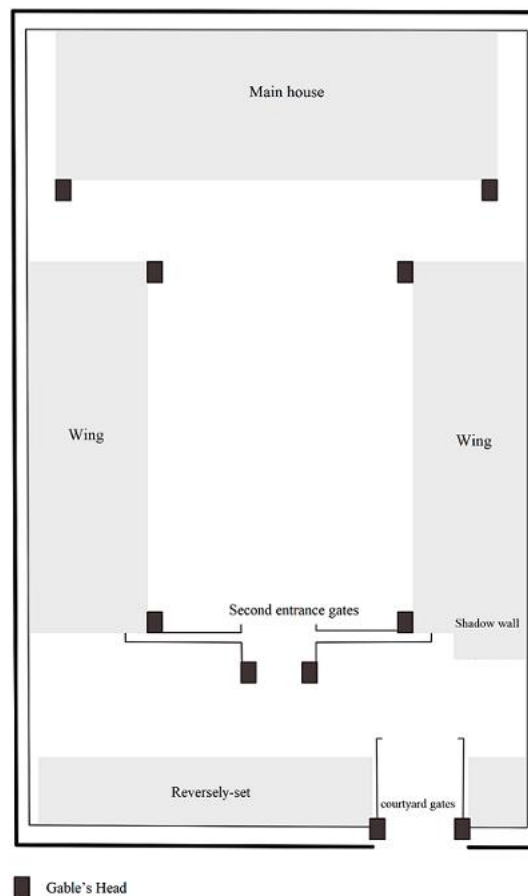


Figure 3. *Decorative Position Map of the Gable's Head Decoration.*

2.2. Decorative Characteristics of the Gable's Head in Xiaozhai Village

In terms of the existing courtyards of Xiaozhai Village, whether they are the gable's head of the courtyard gate or that of the courtyard winghouse, except for one or two simple gables, which are made of square bricks, the rest are carved and decorated, and the carving techniques are diverse with different degree of complexity. There are 36 decorations in Xiaozhai Village and the decorative patterns are basically divided into people, animals, plants and flowers and beasts, supplemented by architectural geometric figures, mountain stone graphics or text graphics. The carving technique is basically fixed, including relief, openwork and round carving.

Table 1. Summary of the Existing Gable's Head Decorations in Xiaozhai Village.

Courtyard number	Position	Carving techniques	Material	Theme	Structure	Quantity
No. 10	One on each side of the courtyard gate	Openwork, relief, round carving	Brick carving	Beasts, flowers, people	Three-stage	2
No. 22	One on each side of the courtyard gate	Relief	Brick carving	Beasts and flowers	Window	2
No. 22	One side of the west winghouse	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers	Window	1
No. 35	One side of the main house	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers	Window	1
No. 41	One on each side of the courtyard gate	Relief	Brick carving	Animals and flowers	Altar	2
No. 41	One gable on each side of the east wing	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers	Altar	2
No. 41	South gable of the west winghouse	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers	Altar	1
No. 48	One north and south gable on the west winghouse	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers	Altar	2
No. 49	One on each side of the courtyard gate	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers	Altar	2
No. 53	One on each side of the courtyard	Relief, openwork and round carving	Brick carving	Beasts, vases and tai chi	Three-stage	2

	gate					
No. 53	One side of the remnant wall in the courtyard	Relief	Brick carving	Auspicious pattern	Altar	1
No. 54	One on each side of the courtyard gate	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers	Altar	2
No. 54	One side of the remnant wall in the courtyard	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers	Altar	1
No. 58	One on each side of the courtyard gate	Relief	Brick carving	Animals and flowers	Altar	2
No. 58	North gable side of the east winghouse	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers	Three-stage	1
No. 59	Both sides of the courtyard gate	None	Brick carving	None	Simple gable made of bricks	2
No. 59	Gable on the side of the west winghouse	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers	Altar	1
Lv Zutan	One on each side of the gable of the east winghouse	Openwork, round carving and relief	Brick carving	Beasts and traditional patterns	Three stage	2
Lv Zutan	One on each side of the gable of the west winghouse	Openwork, round carving and relief	Brick carving	Beasts and traditional patterns	Three-stage	2
Wuni Pavilion	One gable on each side	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers, square patterns, and word "Shou"	Three-stage	2
Shanguanglv	Gable on one side of the east wind room	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers	Three-stage	1
Shanguanglv	One gable on each side of the east wind room	Relief	Brick carving	Flowers and animals	Altar	2

2.3. Regional Attributes of the Gable's Head Decoration of Xiaozhai Village

Most of the traditional residential buildings in the Jinzhong region were from the Ming and Qing dynasties, and the administration of Xiaozhai Village in the Ming and Qing dynasties belonged to Taiyuan Prefecture. According to the administrative division of the prefecture in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the author selected the Gable's head decoration of Jiazhao Village in the central area of Taiyuan Prefecture and the gable's head decoration of Dayangquan Village in the central area of Pingding Prefecture, and compared it with the gable's head decoration of Xiaozhai Village.

Table 2. *Comparison of the Gable's Head Decoration of Xiaozhai Village with That of Taiyuan Prefecture and Pingding Prefecture.*

Region	Installation method	Whether the theme segment is hierarchically segmented	Carving method	Structural features	Relief contents
Taiyuan Prefecture (Jiazhao Village)	Embedded	Yes	Relief, openwork and round carving	There are elephant trunk segments and lotus leaf piers	Traditional auspicious patterns
Pingding Prefecture (Dayangquan Village)	Embedded	No	Relief	There are elephant trunk segments but no lotus leaf piers	Traditional auspicious patterns
Xiaozhai Village	Embedded	Partial segmentation, partial non-segmentation	Relief, openwork and round carving	There are elephant trunk segments. Mostly has lotus leaf piers and a small part has no lotus leaf piers	Traditional auspicious patterns

The comparison results show that the structure of the decorative theme segment of the gable's head in Taiyuan Prefecture is fixed, all of which are three-stage, and the width of the theme segment is smaller than that of the elephant trunk segment. The structure of the decorative theme segment of Pingding Prefecture is fixed, all of which are embedded single segments, and the width of the theme segment is the same as the width of the elephant trunk segment. The pier head decoration of Xiaozhai Village is mainly based on the decorative structure of the gable's head of Taiyuan Prefecture, but it is not fixed and single, and has the common regional characteristics of Pingding Prefecture and Taiyuan Prefecture.

2.4. Cultural Characteristics of the Gable's Head Decoration in Xiaozhai Village

Architectural decoration, like architecture, is closely related to the traditional Chinese cultural structure, cultural origin and emotional expression, and also expresses the life aspirations and beautiful yearning of the courtyard owner, and is the embodiment of real life needs and life emotions.

The decoration interpretation of Xiaozhai Village is divided into peace, wealth, longevity and blessing. The front of the theme segment of the gable's head on the south side of the west wing room of the Jinqi Palace is decorated with openwork and relief carvings of an inverted hanging bat. The pattern is the meaning of seeking

blessings. For example, the peony carvings on the ridge of the main house of No. 60 courtyard in the gate symbolize wealth and auspiciousness. The character “Shou” on the east gable’s head of the gate of No. 58 courtyard in the gate expresses the blessing of the courtyard owner to the elders. The pattern of the treasure bottle in the south gable’s head of No. 53 courtyard in the gate uses the homophonic “bottle” and “peace” to symbolize peace and tranquility.

As the saying goes the more sons, the more blessings and it is necessary to study hard. The patterns of sunflowers in the gable’s of No. 49 courtyard in the gate, and the patterns of the pomegranate in the upper part of the gable’s head of the Wuni Pavilion, all express the owner’s expectation for many children and blessings. The books and scrolls in the carvings on the eaves of the gate of No. 53 courtyard always remind gentlemen to study hard.

Self-cultivation and high character. For example, the front of the theme segment of the gable’s head of the east wingouse of Lv Zutan is carved, with the theme of “the buffaloes in Jiangsu pant when they see the moon mistaking it for the hot sun”, always reminding and admonishing not to be afraid of one’s own shadow. The main carvings of orchids and pine trees on both sides of No. 22 courtyard in the gate are borrowed from high character. The decorative patterns of the other gable’s head theme segments are not listed and classified one by one, but they are all covered by the above three types of cultural interpretations, and can be corresponding to the above three interpretations.

3. Causes of Formation

3.1. Natural Environment

Natural environment factors are one of the main factors affecting the morphological characteristics of villages, which play a decisive role in the scale, group characteristics and layout of villages. [3] Xiaozhai Village is located in the loess hilly area, the scale and layout of the Village are based on the main form of ravines, and the natural environment also determines the main materials of the architectural decoration of the Village. In line with the principle of local materials, the decorative materials of Xiaozhai Village are brick carvings, and most of the other building decoration components are also made of brick as the main decorative material, and the use of bricks is also the premise of realizing a variety of carving techniques for the decoration of the gable’s head.

3.2. Cultural Integration

According to local chronicles, Xiaozhai Village was moved here from Huozhou Mansion by the Zhao family. In addition, the formation of the Jinjing post road in the Ming and Qing dynasties promoted cultural exchanges in the surrounding areas and brought about cultural docking and collision. Therefore, the architectural decoration of Xiaozhai Village, which belongs to Taiyuan Prefecture, presents the decorative characteristics of Pingding Prefecture, and the comparison with the architectural decorative characteristics of traditional villages in the central area of Taiyuan Prefecture can be concluded that the decorative characteristics of the gable’s head of the Village are not single, and that the regional attributes are diversified.

3.3. Economic Factors

Due to the geographical environment, Xiaozhai Village has less land available for farming. Due to the increase in the flow of people brought by the post road, the actual living needs and the support of the government, the emergence of post stations and commercial villages along the route has promoted the economic development of the region. Only one of the existing gable's head decoration in the Village is simple gable without carved bricks, which can reflect the overall economic foundation of Xiaozhai Village from the volume and complexity of the architectural decoration of the Village.

4. Conclusions

The overall layout and pattern of each courtyard of Xiaozhai Village are basically in the original state, and there is a certain local representativeness and typicality from the site selection planning of the overall village, the spatial layout of the single courtyard, the overall architectural style and the decorative style of the single building. The economic development and cultural exchanges brought by the ancient post road make the gable's head decoration of Xiaozhai Village show the characteristics of no single regional attributes, diversified decorative culture, and complex and diverse decoration. The architectural decoration of Xiaozhai Village reflects the traditional architectural characteristics of Taiyuan Prefecture in the Ming and Qing dynasties, and at the same time has the typical characteristics of traditional villages along the Jinjing Ancient Post Road in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, which provides a certain reference for the research on the architectural decoration of traditional villages along the Jinzhong Ancient Post Road.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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Appendix

(1): During the Ming and Qing dynasties, there were two fixed lines from Taiyuan to Beijing, one of which departed from Taiyuan Linfenyi (now Taiyuan Yangqu), passed through Yuci Mingqian, original Shitie Town, Shouyang Tai'an Post Road and Qinquan Post Road, and reached to Pingding Prefecture. Exiting from Niangziguan and reaching to Jingxing, Hebei, it passed through Zhengdingfu to Beijing.

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