

The Characteristics Study on the Architectural Space and Historical Research of Chen's Ancestral Temple

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Abstract: Ancestral temple as an important part of the ancient architecture of West Sichuan Garden, has important value in cultural heritage protection. This article through the surveying of the Chen's Ancestral Temple in Wenjiang, analyze its overall layout, plane composition and morphological characteristics, in order to supplement the in-depth study of the ancestral temple in Western Sichuan, and as an important material for the reconstruction and protection of ancient buildings in West Sichuan Garden. Meanwhile, it can provide important empirical evidence for the study of cultural routes of regional cultural changes and the study of differences in architectural forms within the same cultural circle.

1. Introduction

West Sichuan Garden as a branch of Chinese Classical Garden, has great influence at internal and abroad. West Sichuan Garden is the concentrated expression of West Sichuan region economy, culture, architecture, and political^[1], and Ancient architecture is one of its important elements. Its architectural style is unique, the structure is rigorous, and the details are exquisite, and the same as the garden landscape of West Sichuan Garden, have the pursuit of harmony between man and nature. West Sichuan has many mountains, far away from the imperial court, it made this place become a pure land. During the Qing Dynasty, some prominent families moved to west Sichuan due to the failure of the power struggle, they built ancestral temple to maintain the clan society, it also demonstrates the honor of their clan. Chen's Ancestral Temple is one of the typical cases.

2. Research Summary

This research is part of a series of investigations on ancient buildings in Wenjiang District. Wenjiang District is located in the west of Chengdu, is the birthplace of the ancient Yufu culture, its architecture belongs to the typical Western Sichuan cultural style.

Chen's Ancestral Temple is located in Group 10, Baihua Community, Shou'an Town, Wenjiang District. It has a history of more than 100 years, was built by Chen Gang, the seventh generation of

the Chen family, during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, and expanded by the eighth generation Chen Zongdian and his son Chen Dengjun, which was completed in 8 years from the 3rd year of Tongzhi reign (1864 AD) ^[2]. Locally called it "Chen's Mast" because it has a double mast in front of its door^[3], actually it is Chen's Ancestral Temple (Figure 1). Verified by experts, The Chen's Ancestral Temple is the only remaining complex traditional large-scale house in Western Sichuan that contains residences, ancestral halls, gardens, and academies. It covers an area of more than 10 acres with a building area of 2736 square meters, and has 12 courtyards. The site selection, pattern, space layout, and decoration of its buildings have concentrated on the essence of the local culture of Western Sichuan in the late Qing Dynasty, and it is the precious material for studying the ancestral temples in Western Sichuan. It is of great value to textual research on the architectural style, architectural art and local folk customs of the official families of the Qing Dynasty, and it also has extremely important practical significance for the development of tourism economy in Wenjiang and even Chengdu ^[4].



Figure 1:Chen's Ancestral Temple status quo.

After liberation, the Chen's Ancestral Temple used to be a granary, old folks' home, rural primary school and housing for farmers^[5]. In June 1985, it was approved as the second batch of cultural relics protection units in Chengdu by the Chengdu Municipal People's Government. In December 2002, it was approved as the sixth batch of cultural relics protection units in Sichuan Province by the Sichuan Provincial People's Government. In 2013, it was officially announced as the seventh batch of national key cultural relics protection units by the State Council. On April 25, 2017, the opening ceremony for the renovation of the "West Sichuan Folk House Grand View Garden"—Chen's Ancestral Temple was grandly opened.

It can be seen from the satellite image (Figure 2) that the ancestral temple is surrounded by trees, which conforms to the philosophy of West Sichuan Garden that pursues the harmony and unity of man and nature. The ancestral temple is located at 103°44'23.9" east longitude, 30°49'26.5" north latitude, and faces north by east. Zhu Xi said in "Common Ritual•Ancestral hall", Volume 1 of "Family Ritual": "In the system of a house, it doesn't matter where the front or back is, but the former is south, the latter is north, the left is east, and the right is west^[6]." It shows that the ancestral temple should be facing south regardless of the circumstances. But the Chen's Ancestral Temple is the opposite. Through literature research, it is learned that the Chen family had received the emperor's favor, but later moved here because of the failure of the struggle for power. The direction of the ancestral hall is the direction of the capital, which means that the descendants of the Chen family dare not forget the emperor's grace, and bow to worship. So formed such a peculiar layout.



Figure 2: Satellite picture of Chen's Ancestral Temple.

3. Textual Research of History

According to records, the ancestors of the Chen family moved from Macheng, Hubei, to West Motan (now Qitang Town), Zhoujiachang, Bishan County, Chongqing during the Yongzheng period of the Qing Dynasty (1723 to 1735) and lived there for more than ten years. In the early years of Qianlong (1736), the family moved from Bishan County to Xihe Baijizui, Xinjin County. Later, in the 38th year of Qianlong (1773), they moved from Xinjin County to Wanggaokan, Wenjiang County (Shunjiang Village, Hesheng Township, which is now Liu'an Community, Hesheng Town) for more than ten years., and moved to the current location^[5].

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Chen's Ancestral Temple belonged to the public property, and most of the houses were distributed to farmers, the furniture, daily utensils such as beds, tables, chairs, stools, and even incense burners used for sacrificial offerings were distributed to the farmers as the fruits of victory. It has also set up public canteens, old folks' home, and elementary schools, road maintenance workers used to live here, and it has also been used as a warehouse for rapeseed and wheat. In 1965, the double-bucket mast was demolished. Those precious cultural relics, such as the stele engraved with imperial decree given to the Chen family by Emperor Tongzhi, have been moved out for the construction of hydropower stations, water mills.

In the political movement during the Cultural Revolution, some works of art with embossed reliefs, flower and bird characters, couplet plaques were broken. Its handwriting patterns were scraped off, and used for firewood. The houses are smoky and in disrepair for a long time. The wooden structure is highly decayed, and some have collapsed. The houses are leaking rain, debris is everywhere, the walls are pierced, the water is pooled, and weeds are overgrown. It is a decadent and dilapidated scenery. Although the county government paid much attention to it at that time, due to limited financial resources, the protection and repair of the Chen's Ancestral Temple did not have much effect.

Wenjiang District ushered in development opportunities in 2001, The Chen's Ancestral Temple was valued because of its tourist value, and it was carefully repaired to become what it is today. However, its tourism output is not ideal, and it is currently showing an increasingly desolate scene.

4. Building Monomer Analysis

The main building of Chen's Ancestral Temple is the triple courtyard in the middle, it is divided into the front hall (Yingshan style), the second hall (Xuanshan style), and the main residence (Xieshan style) triple courtyard. It covers an area of 1151.71m², with a surface width of 25m and a depth of 40.7m. The general plan is basically a regular rectangle with a symmetrical central axis. It is a large-scale ancestral building. There are three main buildings in the ancestral hall from east to west. First, enter from the front hall gate to the second hall, which connects to the lobby; then enter the main house patio, which is slightly smaller than the front hall, and connects to the main house behind. Figure 3 is a plan view drawn based on field measurement data (Figure 3).

The Chen's Ancestral Temple was damaged many times and the repair area was large, so many building materials were made by modern times. However, during the restoration process, it was restored based on historical data, so its original style was retained. Its architectural style is a typical Qing Dynasty residential style, incorporating the concept of Western Sichuan Garden, with exquisite and compact combination, and reasonable and generous layout.

The structure of the ancestral temple is a through type timber frame, the pillars form the framework of the entire building. There is a 150mm height difference between the second hall and the front hall ground, the middle part of the second hall and the patio of the main house are both sunk 150mm. The main entrance of the mansion is 5750mm high, with first entrance 6200mm high and second entrance 7300mm high. The main residence is the highest in the whole temple. The whole temple is divided into two parts by the painted wall of the lobby. The front part is a place to entertain outsiders and family gatherings. This part of the building uses black as the main color, which looks solemn and serious. The back is a place where the host and family members live, and the building uses red as the main color, which is more richer in life. At the same time, because the women in the family also live here, the red color adds a bit of delicacy. Considering the sinks placed in the patio of the main house, this decoration style may also have a sense of blessing and warding off evil spirits. There are four known bedrooms in the main house, with distinct primary and secondary functions. There are also two chambers, one kitchen room, and one large room whose purpose is not yet known. It can be seen that the owner is the descendant of a distinguished family.

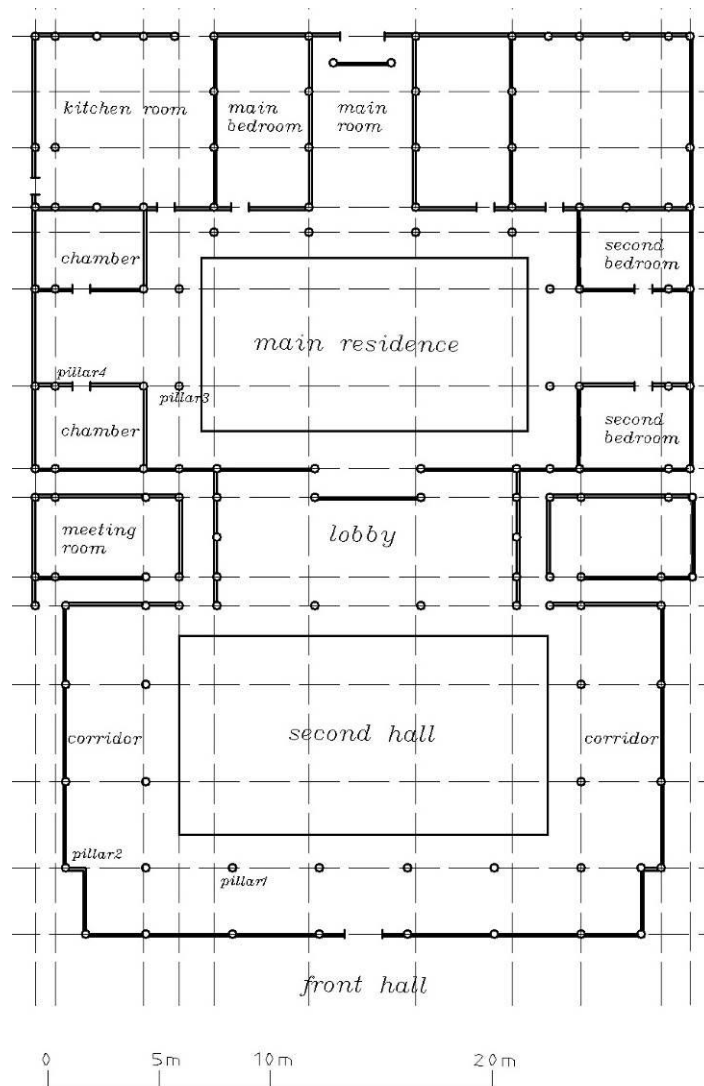


Figure 3: Floor plan of the triple courtyard.

4.1. The Second Hall

Passing through the front hall and entering the gate is the second hall, with an area of 399.32m². The entrance width is 25m, and the position behind the entrance porch is widened to 26.8m. The gate is a black lacquer arched double eaves gate, with wooden grilles on both sides, which can vaguely see the courtyard. The second hall has a depth of 14.9m, a wide space, and a 150mm depression in the middle. This is an important place for the Chen family to hold family meetings. Right behind the second hall is the lobby, which is 13.5m wide, 6.2m deep, and covers an area of 83.7 m². On the north side of the back wall of the lobby, there are three plaques arranged in sequence from north to south. In the middle of the lobby, there is a mural of the giant golden beast "Badger" on the black lacquered wood partition wall, both sides are engraved with the words "Fu" and "Shou" respectively, and this style of black wall and red letters is unique (Figure 4). In Chen's Ancestral Temple, these two characters have become a striking symbol in every courtyard. They appear either in words or in patterns, and have many forms.



Figure 4: The lobby of the second hall.

4.2. The Patio of Main House

Passing through the lobby of the second hall is the patio of the main residence, with an area of 232.85 m², a width of 19.65m, and a depth of 11.85m, which is a regular rectangular space. The roofs here have angled cornices, the bucket arches are painted in many colors, the hall is painted with landscape murals, and there are green windows and red columns., this is where the owner lives. There is a sink in the center of the patio, presumably for geomantic omen and prayer. The patio here is connected to the surrounding environment with corridors to provide both light and ventilation. The layout of the houses is symmetrical, with odd number of bays on three sides, which is a major feature of ancestral temple architecture (Figure 5).



Figure 5: The patio of the main house.

4.3. The Main House

The layout of the main house is symmetrical, and the bedroom, living room and cooking room are neat and orderly. Compared with the spacious front hall, it looks peaceful and elegant. The center of the courtyard is the main room, which has a width of 4.8m, a depth of 7.75m and an area of 37.2 m². The eaves are exquisitely carved, and there are couplets on the middle pillar. This is the place where the family worships the gods and entertains the distinguished guests.

The chamber on the southeast side was once the bedroom set by the owner for the ancestors, commonly known as the noble room, with a width of 4.9m, a depth of 3.7m and an area of 18.13 m². The bedroom is generally not actually inhabited, but is arranged according to the highest specifications and left to the deceased ancestors (Figure 6).

There are bedrooms on both sides of the main room, with a width of 4.3m, a depth of 7.75m and an area of 33.33 m². According to the feudal hierarchical system, the north is respected and the south is inferior. Therefore, the main bedroom is located in the north, and usually the prestigious elders in the family live here. On the side opposite to the noble room, there are two second bedrooms with a width of 4.95m, a depth of 3.75m and an area of 18.56 m². This is where the general members of the family live.



Figure 6: Main room and main bedroom of main house.

5. Conclusion

Chen's Ancestral Temple is one of the largest existing ancestral temples in Western Sichuan^[7]. Its main building, the triple courtyard, is well-preserved and has the complete form and function sequence of the ancestral temples in Western Sichuan. It can be used as a model for the ancestral temples of Western Sichuan in the Qing Dynasty. Through data measurement and multi-faceted investigation of its architectural space, the following points can be drawn.

Judging from the spatial sequence of the triple courtyard of the Chen's Ancestral Temple, the spatial division is clear and distinct—After entering the gate is the open space of the second hall, the building is wide and low, and the decoration style is black background, highlighting the solemnity of this space; after passing through the lobby is the patio space of the main house, which is smaller than the second hall space, the narrow and tall building combined with the red background decoration style highlights the loose and free space of this space. At the same time, the triple courtyard of the Chen's Ancestral Temple also fully considered the two different spatial characteristics in the architectural details, and made detailed treatments for the different functional spaces.

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