Research on Transition of Hakka Enclosed Dwellings using Integral Theory

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Abstract. The article makes an analysis of the transition of Hakka enclosed dwellings using Integral Theory and its core diagram AQAL (All Quadrants, All Levels). It summaries the differences between the Hakka enclosed dwellings in North Guangdong (China) and the Middle South by comparing them separately in the four quadrants of the AQAL diagram: the interior personal experience and psychology, collective culture and meaning; the exterior function, anatomy, form and systems. Integral theory and AQAL diagram helps concern with integrating, or bringing into relationship, knowledge fragmented between specialisms, which may induce us to get more complete and sustainable tactics in traditional vernacular dwelling protection.

Keywords. Hakka dwellings; Integral Theory; Transition

1. Background

In the past research on vernacular dwellings focuses more on architectural functions, anatomy or structure. We analyse their links with the exterior systems (ecological, social or economic) in which they operate, rather than residents living in and their personal experience or collective culture. Integral theory introduces a complete thought to integrate the interior to the exterior, the individual to the collective. As for vernacular dwellings studies, the evolution of individual’s aesthetic and ethnic traditions will be given the same value as the development of external environment and systems, that enables us to attain more comprehensive analysis. This article takes the Hakka enclosed dwellings in Guangdong, China as an example of how Integral theory applying to research on dwellings’ transition along with their evolution in the two cross axes of the AQAL diagram.

2. Hakka and Hakka Enclosed Dwellings

2.1. A brief introduction of the Hakka

The Hakka, literally mean “guest families” in Chinese, are Han Chinese people thought to have originated from the lands bordering the Yellow River. In a series of migrations (five times), the Hakka settled their present areas in Southern China (Guangdong, Guangxi and Fujian). Guangdong comprises about 60% of the total Hakka population, most of which live in the northeast part of the province, particularly in Meizhou. During the fifth migration at the end of Ming Dynasty (1640s), some Hakka families moved along the Dong River to the south (Shenzhen, Huizhou and Dongguan, see Figure 1). The tough environment to adapt and the uneasy natives to conflict with during migrations have shaped the Hakka unique characteristics of culture as well as architecture. This article chooses two similar kinds of typical Hakka dwellings around Meizhou and Shenzhen. By comparing them in the four quadrants of Integral theory, it aims to comprehending the transition of Hakka culture and architecture along the migrations.
2.2. Two Types of Hakka Enclosed Dwellings (Meizhou and Shenzhen)

Hakka enclosed dwellings are the most typical traditional dwellings in Guangdong. Usually one village one building for one family, it is named after the enclosed shape and the effective guard it keeps. So-called “Weilong House” in Meizhou usually represents as a combination of nested semicircle with quadrangle beneath. “Weilong” stands for the nested semicircle which can be added to layer by layer according to the family’s expanding (see Figure 2). In Meizhou district, Weilong house is built basically along the mountain. Combining with another semicircle of village pond (so called Moon Pond) at the foot of the mountain, Weilong House constructs a complete enclosed figure of Yin and Yang, which expresses the Chinese spiritual sustenance of stable and harmonious. Functionally, the outer layers of the enclosed building are for daily living while the central quadrangular halls are for family meetings and ceremonies. In the middle of the periphery Weilong there is a particular room called Dragon Hall. Locating at the highest elevation of the building, Dragon Hall is the top sacred space for the entire family.

Figure 2. Weilong House in Meizhou and its expanding pattern

In Shenzhen, the round enclosed Weilong House has descended to quadrangular one. The periphery layer is usually a two-storeyed enclosure with higher watchtower at each of the corner (see Figure 3). A line of reversely-set rooms guards the inner halls from the foreyard. Generally, the outside Moon Pond and inner building retain the same forms and functions as in Meizhou. The original location of Dragon Hall is replaced by a watchtower even higher than the corner ones. The deviation of Hakka enclosed dwellings from Meizhou to Shenzhen reflects evolution in Hakka culture during migration, which is key topic to discuss in this article.
3. Formatting Integral Theory and AQAL Diagram

Integral Theory is developed by philosopher and transpersonal psychologist, Ken Wilber. He recognized the basis for an integrative framework as the four quadrants in two cross axes, which became the AQAL diagram. The upper part of the vertical axis marks the realm of the individual and the lower part that of the collective. The left part of the horizontal axis marks the realm of interiors of the subjective and the right part that of the objective. Architectural reviewer Peter Buchanan applied the four quadrants to architecture (see Figure 4). He pointed out that any truly complete form of thinking required attention to all quadrants, to the subjective left as well as the objective right. Among the key assumptions informing the AQAL diagram is that a progressive increase in level in one quadrant is matched by a similar rise in each of the others. Buchanan criticized that modernity had devalued the left quadrants of psychic depths and spiritual highs, of empathic connections to others and nature, and of a richly supportive culture that gave meaning and dignified purpose. Thus for Integral thinkers, right-quadrant measures to achieve sustainability, no matter how useful, must be accompanied by left-quadrant development. Buchanan’s critics on modernity inspires much in our research on sustainable vernacular dwellings’ protection.

Figure 3. Enclosed dwellings in Shenzhen

Figure 4. AQAL diagram of Integral Theory
4. The Transition of Hakka Enclosed Dwelling from Meizhou to Shenzhen

According to Integral theory, the transition of Hakka enclosed dwellings should not be only exterior (architectural) but also interior (cultural). Current vernacular dwellings research mainly concentrates on links with certain static culture, that overlook cultural dynamics. Using AQAL diagram we acknowledge that the transmutation of architectural functions and structures should be accompanied by individually aesthetic and collectively cultural development. Figure 5 applies the four quadrants to Hakka. In the Upper Left is Hakka aesthetics, sense of belonging and security. Lower Left is semiotics and the cultural realm, including specific sacrifices and ceremonies. Upper Right is architectural function, form and construction. Lower Right stands for systems as social, ecological and economic.

![Figure 5. The four quadrants as applied to Hakka](image)

4.1. Upper Right Quadrant

Provided by the comparison between enclosed dwellings’ plane graph of Meizhou and Shenzhen (see Figure 2 and 3), the central halls and living spaces morphologically remain the same, as well as the sequence from Moon Pond to backyard. Most of the ponds in Shenzhen keep the semi-circular shape while the backyards enclosed by Weilong deviated from semicircle to variety (see Figure 6). Although the backyards both are at a higher level than ponds, the ones in Shenzhen are built as a platform while in Meizhou they are to slope down.

The reversely-set rooms at the front and the watchtowers in corner are the most notable transmutation from Meizhou to Shenzhen. Together with the Top Watchtower above Dragon Hall, they make up a perfectly defensive enclosure that corresponds with Hakka’s sense of security (the Upper Left). As for the inner form and function, Shenzhen retains the three halls for meetings and ceremonies on the vertical axis and living space on both sides.

There is also a change in construction and material. In Shenzhen many Hakka people choose grey brick to cover the adobe wall inside, protecting it from rainy weather that is much more usual than in Meizhou (LR).

![Figure 6. Five different shapes of Weilong in Shenzhen](image)
4.2. Lower Right Quadrant

Unlike the hilly landscape where Meizhou enclosed dwellings were built, Shenzhen is mostly plain in the impact area between rivers and mountains. Despite the advantage of the flat site, Hakka people in Shenzhen still try building their houses as hilly as those in Meizhou, of which the backyards (Huatai) are always at a higher level than the front. The only difference is that in Meizhou backyards (Huatai) are themselves a slope along the hill while in Shenzhen they are platforms higher than the front (see Figure 7 and Figure 8). It can be inferred that the ecological environment (LR) has made an impact on the form of architecture (UR). As the form has been settled for certain period, it somehow becomes an interior custom of the culture (LL), which may influence people’s choice when the exterior systems change (back to UR and LR).

![Figure 7. Sections from Meizhou to Shenzhen](image1)

![Figure 8. Transmutation of Huatai from Meizhou to Shenzhen](image2)

The economic system has also changed from Meizhou to Shenzhen. The Pearl River Delta (Guangzhou) nearby, possessing thriving business and a long history of trading with abroad, has unconsciously influenced Hakka and their ways of living. Traditional Hakka families in Meizhou are patriarchal and mainly self-supporting by agriculture and hunting. All family members are living on distribution ran by the whole clan. Thus privacy is least needed across daily lives. It can be shown by the organization of living space. All living and sleeping rooms for individual are linked up by a long corridor, through which anyone of the family have easy access toward the other one’s. That goes different in Shenzhen because of the economic development. The diverse economy gives Hakka people plenty of chances to trade and deal. One big family becomes smaller families living together while supporting separately, that promotes demand for privacy, or more private spaces. In Hehu House, one of the biggest Hakka enclosed dwellings in Shenzhen, there is a transition in organizing private rooms for smaller families, that is quite similar with one typical kind in Guangzhou: one smaller family possesses an independent unit that has a living room, a kitchen, an attic and two bedrooms. Units are separated by small courtyards sharing entrance of different families (see Figure 9). For families living in Hehu House they still highly approve of their unified clan, which can be seen by the retaining of central halls and the other public spaces, yet they also choose to accept the social pattern transmitted by people in Pearl River Delta and turn it into space they are living in. As for the four quadrants, different culture (LL) can lead to a transition in economic system, so is in social system.
Such transition affects people’s demand for living (UL) and here again arouses architectural changes (UR).

**Figure 9.** Comparing living space between Meizhou and Shenzhen

### 4.3. Upper Left Quadrant

Clan is absolutely the leadership of a Hakka family. Mostly a Hakka house is for a single family that sharing same family name (such as the Wang’s, the Lee’s). Each Hakka house contains a temple in the middle halls to hold memorial ceremonies for their ancestor. Family tree is also important for descendants to trace their blood relationship, which ties up Hakka people no matter how far away they are from homeland. The persistence of clan beliefs grows stronger as Hakka migrate to the south, that even strengthens their sense of belongings. As a result, no matter how exterior systems change, the central form of temple and other sacred spaces for memorial ceremonies remains the same. On the other hand, migrations are always accompanied by endless conflicts and danger, that make Hakka people suffering more from feelings of insecurity and fear. The reinforcement of enclosure and watchtowers express Hakka’s raising sense of security from Meizhou to Shenzhen (see Figure 10). It can be concluded that individual experience and psychology (UL) consist in collective culture and meaning (LL), which may strongly influence the form and function of architecture (UR). No matter maintaining or strengthening, the upper right quadrant is always corresponding with the left quadrants.

**Figure 10.** Watchtowers of Hakka enclosed dwellings around Shenzhen
It is of vital importance for Hakka that Fengshui is properly applied to when constructing. Pursuing indoor and outdoor penetration and integration, artificial and natural unity and concord, Hakka vernacular dwellings are barely decorative with no color but grey. Few decoration can be found in the central halls for memorial that emphasizes the importance. In Shenzhen, some of the Hakka enclosed houses tend to be delicately built with colorful carving in stone or wood and variation on gable walls. Back in Meizhou, the gable walls are usually monotonous with simple lines. Coming to Shenzhen, several different kinds of gable walls could be found in one single Hakka enclosed house. One typical style is that resembling ones in Guangzhou. “Huier Wall”, literally means the handle of a Chinese pot, looks just like a big ear with exquisite curves (see Figure 11). It can be concluded that aesthetics from Pearl River Delta has affected Hakka people slightly (UL) and then it is shown in some of architectural decoration (UR). What’s more, a complicated gable wall that could have combined Chinese and western styles is found in Zhengpulin House (see Figure 11). It is said to be rebuilt at the 1910s when some part of the district was colonized by European. In this case, social and ecological systems (LR) make an impact on either aesthetics or semiotics (UL and LL), whose evolution or even integration can cause detailed response (UR).

Figure 11. Different shapes of gable wall in Shenzhen

4.4. Lower Left Quadrant
Hakka have direct relation to Han in Middle China both geographically and historically. Their interior Confucian ideas or religion for Fengshui is deep-rooted and keep controlling architectural function and form even when they migrate to a completely different region. Culture no doubt has its decisive effect on forms of Hakka dwellings. Just see how similar are the central halls with those in North China, which strictly observe symmetric pattern and hierarchic order (see Figure12). The semi-circular Weilong or watchtowers on the corner may be adaption patterns to new exterior systems, but the symmetric and hierarchic form is not easily to deviate. It is culture (LL) that primarily influences the form of dwellings (UR). Exterior systems (LR) can be correction factor to the realm of function, form and construction (UR).

Figure 12. Central halls of Hakka dwellings

There are also semiotic meanings in Hakka dwellings. The higher backyard and the lower pond create a landscape of Fengshui (mountain and river). The enclosed Weilong, with its head on the top (the Dragon Hall), is symbolized as Qi of a dragon that can protect Hakka from suffering. The backyard called Huatai, meaning pregnancy in Chinese, represents Hakka’s blessing over prosperous descendants. Such belief goes on in Shenzhen as the backyard is always at a higher level than the front.
Although in Shenzhen the layer of Weilong is more difficult to be added to, there’s still a example of two quadrangular Weilong with eight watchtowers on the corner. Semiotics (LL) has a deep impact on Hakka and their dwellings (UR). It may not be easily shifted even when the exterior systems (LR) have changed.

In Pearl River Delta (particularly in Guangzhou), memorial gateway is one of the typical component of an ancestral temple. It can be verified that many Hakka enclosed dwellings in Shenzhen also process a memorial gateway between the entrance and the foreyard (see Figure 13), that is barely seen back in Meizhou. The memorial gateway in Guangzhou ancestral temple is commemorative, informative, decorative and corresponds to Fengshui, that functionally and sympathetically matches the demands of Hakka. The memorial gateway in Hakka enclosed dwellings is usually a little higher than the enclosure and there is a four-letter proverb in the middle on the stone stele. In Hehu House it says “living here all”, representing their hope for their family to live long and prosperous. When one culture has been partially sympathetically matched by the adjoining culture, it may lead to architectural imitation that corresponding to such sympathy. In this process, two cultures have attained integration.

![Figure 13. Memorial gateways of Hakka dwellings in Shenzhen](image)

5. Integrations

By integrating the four quadrants of Hakka and Hakka dwellings, it is clearly seen that right-quadrant measures to achieve sustainability, no matter how useful, must be accompanied by left-quadrant development. According to the analysis above, five brief connections can be concluded in the four quadrants (see Figure 14): parallel connection, part and whole, metaphor, proceeding connection, casual connection and background connection.

![Figure 14. Connections in four quadrants](image)
Vernacular architectural function or form has parallel connection with exterior systems. Their mutual cultural origin plays an intermediary role as they both facing development. It is necessary to take interior cultural transition into consideration when relating architectural development to exterior systems’ transmutation.

Aesthetics and culture are the same as part and whole. Collective cultural evolution is always accompanied by individual psychological change.

Some part of vernacular architecture, such as decoration, symbolizes the metaphor for aesthetics or psychology.

Exterior systems are to proceed from interior culture. The transition of interior culture should lead to social, ecological and economic evolution.

Collective culture is the prime cause of architectural form. Analyzing vernacular architecture requires the background given by culture and semiotics. The different forms taken by dwellings are a complex phenomenon which no single explanation will suffice, so is that with the transition of culture. In this article, Integral theory and the AQAL diagram provide us with a clear framework that both separately and comprehensively summarizes the transition of Hakka and Hakka dwellings. This article on Hakka with Integral theory hopes to attract more multidisciplinary perspectives other than Integral theory to study vernacular dwellings. That would be of great significance for the maintenance of vernacular dwellings and the tactics of future residential design.

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