Shanxi Courtyard Dwellings and Hakka Walled Village: A Comparative Study of Wang Family Courtyard and Sam Tung Uk Walled Village

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ABSTRACT

Through a historical research on two well-preserved vernacular Chinese dwellings: The Wang Family Courtyard in Shanxi and the Sam Tung Uk Walled Village in Hong Kong, this paper examines the cultural sustainability of architecture in China, and explores what factors have contributed to their success and decline, and what can be learned from their stories. In doing so, the article employs the analytical framework developed in the author’s previous works, that is, architectural form and space, and social and cultural dimensions of the cases. The findings reveal that ancestor worship was a common practice in the two families, hard work and traditional family values had resulted in their success. The abandonment of traditional values and schooling, coupled with social and military instability in the country, along with urban sprawl, destroyed the family unity and businesses, and ultimately caused the moving. The study has implications for the contemporary world beyond China.

Keywords: courtyard house, courtyard dwelling, vernacular architecture, Chinese architecture, Chinese culture, China

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1. INTRODUCTION
Chinese courtyard dwellings first emerged in the north and eventually appeared in the south due to migration. Since during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), large populations were encouraged to move to other parts of China to enhance their growth. Most settlers built new residences in the style of their original homes. This confluence of building patterns demonstrates the layers and veins of acculturation within China over the centuries [1-4]. This article makes a comparative study of two cases: The Wang Family Courtyard in Shanxi, and the Sam Tung Uk Walled Village in Hong Kong. The former is an excellent example of northern Chinese courtyard dwellings, whereas the latter is an outstanding exemplar of southern Hakka dwellings, both of which are open to the public as museums and occupy important places in Chinese architectural history. The study employs the analytical framework developed in the author’s previous works [5,6], that is, architectural form and space, and social and cultural dimensions of the cases.

2. CASE STUDY: WANG FAMILY COURTYARD IN SHANXI
Wang Family Courtyard (王家大院), also called Wang Family Compound, Wang Family Mansion, or Wang Family Manor, is the largest of Shanxi courtyard dwellings situated in Jingsheng Town (静升镇), 12 km east of Lingshi County (灵石县) in the south of Jinzhong (晋中) Basin, and 35 km from the Ancient City of Pingyao (平遥), which is a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site.

Jingsheng has a time-honored past as a famous historical and cultural town. Archeological excavations revealed the town has a painted pottery site of the Neolithic Age, demonstrating ancient Chinese people have dwelt in the place for a long time. The tomb cluster dating from the Shang dynasty (c. 16th–11th century BCE) boasts many precious relics from the Bronze Age. The cultural relics from the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BCE–220 CE) also abound here. Today, Jingsheng still has many buildings constructed in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) [7].

The Wangs were one of the “Four Principal Families” (四大家族) in Shanxi during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). The Wang clan originally came from Langya (now Qingdao) in Shandong, then migrated to Taiyuan, capital of Shanxi, before their ancestor Wang Shi (王实) moved to Jingsheng in 1312–1313. They mainly engaged in agriculture, but also made and sold tofu. The business thrived as a result of the family’s hard work and virtues: “To be rich and benevolent” (为富要仁). Some members began to attend school, making the Wangs a distinguished family in Jingsheng [2, 7].

According to the preserved plaque, “The Origin of the Jingsheng Wang Family” (《静升王氏源流碑记》), they did very well during Kangxi (1662–1722), Yongzheng (1722–1735), and Qianlong (1735–1796) reigns of the Qing dynasty: “Their members who are scholars are experts in the fields of history and classics and have emerged one after another; their members who are farmers enjoy rich harvests and leave fertile heritage to their offspring; their members who are workers have thorough knowledge of all kinds of skills and produce exquisite works; their members who are businessmen earn profits from businesses all around them and gather abundant wealth”[7] (my translation).

It took the Wang Family 300 years to build five fortress-like compounds in total. The middle fort is named Hongmenbu (红门堡, Red Gate Fortress), also called Hengzhenbu (恒贞堡), built in 1739–1793, which took 54 years, covering an area of about 25,000 sqm (~270,000 sqft), with 88 courtyards and 776 rooms. The east fort is Gaojiaya (高家崖, High Family Ridge), also

1 乔家、王家、曹家、渠家。
2 “士者经史专家，英辈迭出；农者沃产遗后，坐享丰盈；工者彻通诸艺，精巧相生；商者逐利湖海，掘资万千。”
called Shilǚbu (视履堡), built in 1796–1811, which took 16 years, covering 20,000 sqm (≈215,000 sqft), with 35 courtyards and 342 rooms. The west fort (西堡子) is Chongningbu (崇宁堡), built during the Yongzheng period of the Qing dynasty, covering 35,000 sqm (≈377,000 sqft). The southeast fort (东南堡) is Heyibu (和义堡), built during the Qianlong period, covering 47,320 sqm (≈510,000 sqft), which is the largest compound constructed by the Wang Family. The down south fort (下南堡) is Gongjibu (拱极堡), built during the same period and in the same town, is the smallest group of buildings, covering 11,880 sqm (≈128,000 sqft). Therefore, Wang Family Courtyard is the collective term for the five groups of buildings, covering an area of more than 150,000 sqm (≈1615,000 sqft) [2,7].

Gaojiaya and Hongmenbu [Figure 1] have been open to visitors [Figure 2] since 1997 and 1998 respectively, as the “Museum of Art of Vernacular Chinese Architecture,” 3 and the “Museum of Art of Wang Family Courtyard,” 4 including the Ancestral Temple (孝义祠) [Figure 3], the opened area is about 45,000 sqm (≈485,000 sqft), with a total of 123 courtyards and 1118 rooms. Moreover, Wang Family Courtyard is praised as the “First Vernacular Residence of China.” 5 In 1999, the Chinese Writers Association held a ceremony there, designating the Wang Family Courtyard as a base for the writers to live among the locals for deepening their understanding of the people’s lives there [7].

2.1 Architectural form and space of the Shanxi courtyard dwellings

Wang Family Courtyard is situated at the slopes of Mount Mian (绵山) and faces the river, with a layout fully taking advantage of the landscape and the site contour. The design is a successful combination of cave-dwellings [Figure 4] with tile-roofed dwellings [Figure 5] in a harmonious style and a lofty

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3 中国民居艺术馆
4 王家大院民居艺术馆
5 华夏民居第一宅

Figure 1. Wang Family Courtyard model showing Gaojiaya (高家崖, High Family Ridge) compound on the right/east, and Hongmenbu (红门堡, Red Gate Fortress) compound on the left/west, connected by a bridge. Source: Photo by the author, 2017

Figure 2. Gaojiaya compound East Gate which is open to visitors. Source: Photo by the author, 2017

Figure 3. Wang Family Courtyard, Ancestral Temple (孝义祠). Source: Photo by the author, 2017
construction. Gaojiaya in the east of the two complexes is not heavily protected, and Hongmenbu in the west of it is surrounded by high protective walls, whose plan is symmetrical and concealing the family surname, the Chinese character “王” (王), literally means “king” or “ruler.” The two parts are connected by a bridge over a deep valley. Its traditional northern Chinese courtyard architectural style is very distinctive, meanwhile, the complex has also mimicked the garden art from southern China [2,7,8].

Wang Family Courtyard has its public area allocated in the front and the private at the back, conforming to Chinese residential design principles since the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE). Besides, some parts have gardens in the front and courtyards at the back according to the site geography. Some courtyards are large and elegant, while others are small and exquisite. Layers of gardens on different levels of the hill give the compound more vitality and grandeur [2,7,8] [Figure 6].

All the courtyards are placed independently, while also connected with each other closely, surrounded by a wall with four gates pierced at suitable locations. There are many different types of gates and doors in the compound, appearing that there are courtyards after courtyards and gates after gates, like being in a maze. Halls, pavilions, studies, gardens, and kitchens are all located at the most appropriate places. There are also underground passages in the courtyard, which shows a strong sense of defense back then [2,7,8].

Wang Family Courtyard is rather expensive, as they paid little attention to the construction cost. Outstanding works of carvings (brick carving, wood carving, and stone carving) can be seen everywhere in the compounds, and each piece is a fine work of...
art of very high quality in both northern and southern Chinese architectural styles and standards. These carvings have varied themes and rich content, exhibiting Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist ideologies, as well as Chinese folk customs. In Gaojiaya, most of the decorative carvings reflect the “delicate and dense” artistic style of Qing dynasty, presenting Chinese civilization in a unique manner [Figures 7-9]. The carvings are an important reason that Wang Family Courtyard is reputed as the “Art Gallery of Chinese Vernacular Architecture.” Most of the furniture were made during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. Although the style is usually simple, the carvings on the furniture are very exquisite, showing the natural beauty of fine textures, colors, and patterns of the wood [7,8].

Figure 7. Stone carving of a screen wall with double sides, “carp jumping over dragon gate.” Source: Photo by the author, 2017

Figure 8. Stone carving of an open-mouth animal. Source: Photo by the author, 2017

2.2 Social and cultural dimensions of the Shanxi courtyard dwellings

The Wangs prospered during the reigns of Kangxi (1662–1722), Yongzheng (1722–1735), Qianlong (1735–1796), and Jiaqing (1796–1820) in Qing dynasty. They conducted large-scale constructions, built many houses, ancestral temples, graveyards, stores, and workshops. Besides, they also established free private schools and barns, built roads and bridges, dug channels, offered relief to those people struck by disasters, along with other charitable works. In this period, the family produced 12 top-rank government officials [2,7,8].

Wang Family Courtyard strictly followed the Chinese feudal rules of construction styles for different social ranks, reflecting class differences in the old society and the concepts of scholar-officials. Gaojiaya has two major courtyards of three-rise quadrangles (三进四合院), with an elevated Ancestral Hall to hold ceremonies to worship their ancestors, and two rooms for young female members to live on the sides. There are also separate courtyards for cooking and studying, common courtyards for reading and planting flowers, and courtyards for the staff and guards [2,7,8].

The artworks of calligraphies and paintings in the Wang Family Courtyard were mostly from famous literati in the Ming and Qing dynasties, such as the calligraphy of celebrated painter Zheng Banqiao (鄭板橋), inscribed wood boards of Qi Junzao (祁寯藻),
paintings of Fu Shan (傅山), Liu Yong (柳永), Tang Yin (唐寅), and Wen Zhengming (文徵明), and stone carvings and inscribed wood boards of Weng Fanggang (翁方纲), can all be found here. After 200–300 years, these works remain charmmful, inviting visitors to linger and savor the flavor [8] [Figure 10].

Figure 10. Inscribed wood boards hung on the two columns at the entrance to a dwelling in the Wang Family Courtyard. Source: Photo by the author, 2017

Very close to the Wang Family Courtyard in Jingsheng Town is the Zishou Temple (资寿寺) built in the Tang dynasty (618–907), and the Confucius Temple (文庙) built in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) that have functioned as educational places in the area [2,7].

The Wangs began to decline during Emperor Daoguang reign (1820–1850). Besides the social and political factors, another important cause was the later generations’ abandonment of traditional family values such as diligence and prudence. The clan members once pooling their incomes together to sustain the family corporation, was later divided when the sons grew up and established their own conjugal units [9]. Some family members then became increasingly extravagant, some left school, while others indulged in opium, leading to the erosion of the previously prosperous family [2,7,8].

After the Lugou Bridge (Marco Polo Bridge) Incident in 1937, the whole family moved southward. The few members who still owned shops in the province, or other big cities like Beijing and Tianjin before the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), lost all they had. With a history of over 700 years, the Wangs have lived for 28 generations through all the struggles. In recent decades, they have produced new talents in various fields [2,7,8].

3. CASE STUDY: SAM TUNG UK WALLED VILLAGE IN HONG KONG

Sam Tung Uk (三棟屋/三栋屋, “San Dong Wu” in Pinyin, literally “Three-Beam Dwellings”), is a traditional Hakka6 walled village built in Hong Kong in 1786. Occupying an area of 2,000 sqm (~21,500 sqft), the village was founded by a Chan (陳/陈, “Chen” in Pinyin) clan who originally came from Fujian, had moved to Guangdong, and then to Hong Kong to engage in farming in the mid-18th century [10-12].

Under the leadership of the clan father Chan Yam-Shing (陳任盛), they constructed seawalls along the coast of Tsuen Wan (荃湾) to reclaim land to cultivate. Chan and his four sons worked very hard and flourished in their new environment. As the Chan clan grew bigger and bigger, they found this location suitable for building a walled village [Figures 11-13]. The name of Sam Tung Uk describes the original floorplan, as the common area in the village is mainly divided into three parts: Ancestral Hall [Figure 14] in the north/upper part, Assembly Hall [Figure 15] in the middle, and Entrance Hall [Figure 16] in the south/lower part. The roof of each part is supported by a beam (横梁), and this beam can also be called a “tung” (棟, “dong” in Pinyin). This is how the name came. The Chan clan moved into the village on an auspicious date in 1786 during the Qing dynasty. In the 1970s, the Chan clan still lived

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6 Hakka (客家, “Kejia” in Mandarin), literally “guest people,” usually refers to clans that moved from north or central China and settled in the south. Hakka people share Han Chinese culture but with their own language and customs.
and farmed in the area. Finally, with the urban sprawl, the last clan member moved out, and Sam Tung Uk was vacated in April 1980 [10-12].

Sam Tung Uk has witnessed the historical transformation of Tsuen Wan from an agricultural area to a modern municipal administration over the past 235 years. Because of the society’s economic development, many traditions have disappeared rapidly. Nevertheless, the

Figure 11. Sam Tung Uk Walled Village model showing the whole symmetrical compound with a central axis. Source: Photo by the author, 2018

Figure 12. Sam Tung Uk Walled Village plan showing the whole symmetrical compound with a central axis. Source: Photo by the author, 2018

Figure 13. Sam Tung Uk Walled Village south-facing façade. Source: Photo by the author, 2018

Figure 14. Sam Tung Uk Ancestral Hall in the north along the central axis. Source: Photo by the author, 2018

Figure 15. Sam Tung Uk Assembly Hall in the middle along the central axis. Source: Photo by the author, 2018

Figure 16. Sam Tung Uk Entrance Hall in the south along the central axis. Source: Photo by the author, 2018
Entrance Hall [Figure 16], Assembly Hall [Figure 15], and Ancestral Hall [Figure 14], and twelve of the original dwellings [Figure 17] are preserved. In March 1981, Sam Tung Uk Walled Village was recognized by the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) as a historical monument to be protected from destruction. AAB repaired the village and brought some of the agricultural tools for display from Luo Rui He (罗瑞合) Hakka walled village in Baoan County (宝安县), Shenzhen, Guangdong. The government funded the restoration and converted it into a museum in 1986–1987. It has opened to the public since then. The Faculty of Architecture at the University of Hong Kong has involved in the restoration project, which has won the Pacific Heritage Award by the Pacific Asia Tourist Association in 1990. In 2016, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Office set up the “Hong Kong Intangible Cultural Heritage Center” to transform Sam Tung Uk into an Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition and Resource Center. There are halls for displaying antique furniture, handicrafts, agricultural tools, and daily necessities of Hakka people, to enhance the public awareness and understanding of intangible cultural heritage through educational and promotional activities, including exhibitions, lectures, seminars, demonstrations, and workshops.

3.1 Architectural form and space of the Hakka walled village

As Sam Tung Uk is near the sea, high walls were constructed without windows as a way of defense against pirates and rival clans who frequently attacked and robbed the villagers at the time. The village was built on traditional Chinese architectural principles of bilateral symmetry with a central axis, resembling a chessboard [Figures 11 and 12]. The compound consists of three horizontal rows formed by three main halls (Entrance Hall [Figure 16], Assembly Hall [Figure 15], Ancestral Hall [Figure 14]), and two main courtyards [Figure 18], walled in by lines of dwellings on two sides and at the back. There are four dwelling units [Figure 12] clustered around the Ancestral Hall at the north center on the central axis, facing the main entrance in the south. Four Chinese characters signifying “Chan Family Ancestral Hall” are engraved on the granite lintel above the door frame [Figure 16].

As the Chan clan grew its members, a row of Side Houses (横屋) was added on each side and at the back of the original structure, maintaining the rectangular plan while allowing for easy expansion. The left, right, and back rows of dwellings encircle the village, similar to Chinese sanheyuan (三合院). Each main hall faces a courtyard, and each house faces a lightwell, providing good airflow and natural light between the units. The courtyard [Figure 18] has a drainage system so that the villagers could wash their clothes in it. Inside the village, the lanes are narrow [Figures 19 and 20] and the entrances short as defense measures for protecting the clan members.
3.2 Social and cultural dimensions of the Hakka walled village

The Ancestral Hall [Figure 14] occupied the most prominent position in the compound whose design showed the importance of ancestor worship in Hakka culture, indicating a deep respect for family tradition. It was where the clan gathered to pay respect to their ancestors, where the family history records (genealogy) were kept, and where the boys of the Chan clan studied. During Chinese New Year, parents of every newborn baby boy in the village would go to the Ancestral Hall to light a lantern, to tell their ancestors about the new member of the family and pray for their protection [10,11,16].

The Assembly Hall [Figure 15] was the sitting room and served as an activity center for celebrating festivals (e.g., Lunar New Year and Lantern Festival), holding banquets, and discussing village matters. It was also used as a private school in the village since Hakka people understood the importance of education, they set up a school for their children to receive education within the village. The Entrance Hall [Figure 16] only opened when important guests visited the village, and it was for the guests to board and alight their sedan chairs. All villagers would use the side doors to go in and out. The two rooms adjacent to the Entrance Hall were storages. The four Period Houses (故居) [Figure 17] flanking the three main halls were the living quarters of Chan Yam-Shing’s four sons. The Side Houses (横屋) were for siblings and servants of the clan. Mezzanines were built in some of the dwellings. The clan lived and dined on the ground floor while the mezzanine was used for storing crops and farming tools as it was less affected by dampness [10-12,16].

As farmers at the time, the Chan clan planted rice, pineapples, sweet potatoes, and vegetables, good enough for their daily living. The Hakka women had to work in the fields, so they did not bind their feet. Outside the village, the cereal was laid in the square (now a garden) [10,15,17] for drying in the sun. When the farmers fanned the winnowing machine, a gust of wind generated would blow against falling grains. Good grains would be screened out from impurities. There is a well in the north of the village, which provided drinkable water for the villagers. Although all of the

Figure 18. Sam Tung Uk Courtyard in front of the Assembly Hall. Source: Photo by the author, 2018

Figure 19. Sam Tung Uk Walled Village lane. Source: Photo by the author, 2018

Figure 20. Sam Tung Uk Walled Village Lane. Source: Photo by the author, 2018
Chan clan have moved away, they are still very attached to their former home [13,16,18].

4. DISCUSSION

The author visited Shanxi Wang Family Courtyard in 2017 and Hong Kong Sam Tung Uk Walled Village in 2018. These vernacular buildings offer rare opportunities for visitors to have a glimpse into traditional way of living in north and south of China in the past. This section compares the architectural form and space of the two cases, and examines their social and cultural dimensions.

4.1 Architectural form and space

Both the Wang Family Courtyard and the Sam Tung Uk Walled Village are fortified residential compounds protected by high walls without windows for defense against invaders. They also followed traditional Chinese planning and architectural design principles of bilateral symmetry with a central axis, like a chessboard. They both have incorporated courtyards and lightwells between their dwelling units. The buildings and courtyards in Wang Family Compounds are much larger than those in Sam Tung Uk Walled Village. The differences in dwelling and yard sizes are observed across China, which can be attributed to four factors: regional climate, population density, land availability, and the social rank and wealth of the family.

4.2 Social and cultural dimensions

Wang Family Courtyard and Sam Tung Uk Walled Village were both situated in the rural areas of China, and both families followed traditional practice of worshipping their ancestors in their Ancestral Temple/Hall within the compounds. This practice helped create a link between the past and present, and is conducive to sustaining the family values in their offspring. However, patriarchy and hierarchy existed in these two families, which was common across imperial China. Both families took hard work and business virtues as their family values which accounted for their prosperity and success. Both families paid attention to educating their younger generations by setting up private schools at home. In the case of Wang Family Courtyard in Shanxi, they also built a Confucius Temple nearby in the town [Table 1].

Table 1. Wang Family Courtyard in Shanxi and Sam Tung Uk Walled Village in Hong Kong

| Comparison              | Wang Family Courtyard                          | Sam Tung Uk Walled Village                      |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Architectural form      | Five fortified compounds with central axis and in symmetry | One fortified compound with central axis and in symmetry |
| Courtyard space         | Series of larger courtyards within the compounds | Series of smaller courtyards and lightwells within the compound |
| Garden space            | In southern Chinese style within the compounds  | Added in 1987 at the back of the village outside the compound |
| Three carvings          | Brick, wood, and stone carvings                | Unknown                                         |
| Ancestral temple/hall   | Ancestor worship at home                       | Ancestor worship at home                        |
| Family values           | Hard work and business virtues                 | Hard work in farming                            |
| Home schooling          | Private School and Confucius Temple in the town | Private School in the village                    |
| Reason of moving        | Japanese invasion and war                       | Fast economic development and urban sprawl      |

Source: Author’s summary
5. CONCLUSION
Both the Wang Family Courtyard in Shanxi and the Sam Tung Uk Walled Village in Hong Kong are priceless treasures of the Chinese nation and the humankind, which have been regarded as such and well restored and preserved by the Chinese Government. It shows the national awareness of historical values of vernacular architecture in China. These two cases are vivid history books made of bricks that offer younger generations a snapshot of Chinese way of life in the north and south of China in the past. They also tell us stories of what made a family successful and what caused a family to decline. The physical high walls built around the compounds did not protect the Wang Family from the Japanese invasion which ultimately caused their decline; nor did the walls of the Sam Tung Uk Village protect the Chan clan from the urban sprawl, which eventually drew the Chan Family out of their former home of two centuries. The demise of the imperial system along with the traditional way of life may indicate that the past cannot be fully revived. Nevertheless, the courtyard concept has been incorporated into contemporary living because of its energy efficiency and environmental friendliness, as well as its ability to promote social interaction and cultural activities.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The author declares no conflict of interest.

FURTHER DISCLOSURE
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