

From Line to Form: Artistic Language and Aesthetic Construction in the Lianjia Wood Sculpture of the Wang Grand Courtyard

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Abstract: This study explores the lianjia wood sculptures of the Wang Grand Courtyard in Shanxi Province, analyzing how their lines, forms, and compositional structures construct an artistic language that merges functionality with symbolism. Through line-drawing analysis, field observation, and interviews, it examines the rhythmic order, spatial logic, and symbolic motifs of these carvings to reveal their visual and narrative functions within architectural space. The research finds that lianjia carvings embody the traditional Chinese aesthetic ideals of harmony between form and spirit, serving not only as refined craftsmanship but also as symbolic narrative systems preserving cultural memory and artistic values — thus providing vital insights for contemporary art and cultural heritage revitalization.

Keywords: Line, Form, Aesthetic Construction; Lianjia Wood Sculpture.

1. Introduction

Shanxi is the province in China that preserves the most ancient buildings. Professor Liang Sicheng called it the "National Treasure House of Architecture". This treasure house houses the Wang Family Courtyard, which was built during the Ming and Qing dynasties and has been well-preserved to this day. Although the Wang Family Compound was only recognized by the outside world for a long time, it has eventually been appreciated by people for its unique three-carving art and historical and cultural value. Some even regard it as a "national treasure, a human treasure, and an invaluable treasure" [1].

Traditional Chinese timber architecture, widely regarded as one of the pinnacles of world architectural history, embodies the integration of structural ingenuity and profound cultural symbolism. Within this system, the lianjia—positioned on the outer side of the doorframe, with metal rings at the top for suspending curtains — performs dual functions. From a functional perspective, it serves as a device for spatial separation and transition while structurally reinforcing the connection between beams and columns, thereby achieving a unity of utility and ornamentation. From an aesthetic perspective, it provides a surface for exquisite wood carvings, transforming transitional architectural spaces into visual and symbolic focal points. The Wang Grand Courtyard, renowned for its monumental scale, rigorous spatial order, and elaborate decorative system, preserves particularly refined lianjia carvings of great artistic and research value. As Liang Sicheng (1984) observed, components of traditional Chinese architecture often embody a harmonious integration of function and ornament, and the lianjia exemplifies this principle by fulfilling spatial needs while simultaneously achieving aesthetic expression [2].

Despite their architectural and cultural significance, lianjia carvings have received relatively limited scholarly attention. Research on traditional Chinese architecture has primarily focused on dougong, columnbeam frameworks, and roof structures, while this seemingly marginal yet symbolically rich component has been largely neglected. Functionally, the lianjia creates transitional layers between spaces, regulating sightlines and movement; artistically, its carvings incorporate auspicious motifs, floral patterns, and narrative imagery that embody moral values, religious beliefs, and markers of social identity. As Steinhardt has argued, transitional carved elements in architecture “constitute a visual language that bridges function and symbolism [3].” From this perspective, an in-depth study of the lianjia is crucial for addressing a significant scholarly gap, particularly in relation to its semiotic and aesthetic dimensions.

The present study aims to reveal the intrinsic logic and aesthetic principles of traditional Chinese timber architecture through a focused examination of the lianjia carvings of the Wang Grand Courtyard. By analyzing their linear rhythms, compositional structures, and symbolic imagery, the research highlights the dual role of the lianjia as both a spatial partition and a medium of cultural expression. This study contributes new theoretical perspectives to ongoing debates in architecture, art history, and heritage studies, particularly regarding decorative systems and their social meanings. As Clunas emphasized, the symbolic codes embedded in decorative art provide critical insights into the cultural landscape of a historical period; the lianjia carvings of the Wang Grand Courtyard may thus be read as microcosmic reflections of such systems [4]. Accordingly, this

research not only advances theoretical understanding but also offers practical implications for cultural heritage preservation and the contemporary revitalization of traditional craftsmanship.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research orientation, with the case study method serving as its primary research strategy. The research focuses on an in-depth analysis of the *lianjia* (curtain rack) wood sculptures of the Wang Grand Courtyard, emphasizing themes derived from natural elements and social narratives. Specifically, the objects of study encompass motifs of animals, human figures, plants, vessels, and geometric patterns found in the *lianjia* carvings. Line-drawing analysis is employed to explore their symbolic meanings and aesthetic characteristics.

For data collection, a multi-method approach was employed, including direct observation, field investigation, in-depth interviews, and object-based cultural heritage analysis. This diverse methodological design ensures the richness and comprehensiveness of the data while authentically reflecting the artistic and cultural features of the research subject. Fieldwork was conducted through sustained participation, involving systematic observation, documentation, and analysis within the original architectural environment, thereby preserving the contextual authenticity and cultural integrity of the materials.

Furthermore, this study introduces semiotic and formalist aesthetic theories to deepen the interpretation of the artistic language of *lianjia* wood sculptures. According to Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, the relationship between the "signifier" (visual form) and the "signified" (cultural connotation) serves as the key to revealing the core of symbolic expression. Elements such as phoenixes, peonies, and human figures are not merely visual motifs but cultural symbols embodying ethical order and familial ideals. From a semiotic perspective, these carvings transcend their decorative function to become a visual language that expresses the harmony among ritual, beauty, and moral order.

Meanwhile, Clive Bell's theory of formalist aesthetics provides a complementary framework for the aesthetic analysis of the wood sculptures' formal qualities. Bell's concept of "significant form" emphasizes the pure aesthetic emotion evoked by the interplay of lines, rhythm, and composition [5]. The rhythmic curves, balanced structures, and relief layers of the Wang Grand Courtyard wood sculptures vividly demonstrate this concept. Their formal beauty not only fulfills architectural purposes but also evokes what Bell terms "aesthetic emotion"—a perceptual response that transcends narrative content and engages the viewer's sensory experience.

The integration of Saussure's semiotics and Bell's formalism enables this research to analyze the *lianjia* carvings through the interactive mechanism of "sign-form-meaning." This dual theoretical framework situates the study within the intersection of visual semiotics and modern aesthetics, providing a systematic interpretive approach to understanding how material, technique, and symbolism are integrated in the artistic expression of the Wang Grand Courtyard's wood sculptures.

3. Discussion

The utilization of wood sculpture in Chinese architectural ornamentation can be traced back to the Shang and Zhou dynasties, establishing it as a traditional craft with millennia of history. Within the vernacular dwellings of Jinzhong, Shanxi, this art form occupies a prominent role, appearing in beams, lintels, rafters, and window lattices. These decorative practices reveal not merely a desire for embellishment but a deliberate integration of structural function with aesthetic expression, thereby realizing the unity of utility and artistry. Among such architectural contexts, the Wang Grand Courtyard stands out as an iconic exemplar of Jin merchant culture and northern Chinese architectural ingenuity. Distinguished by monumental scale, formal precision, and compositional sophistication, it is especially celebrated for the refinement of its wood sculptures. Far beyond decoration, these works embody symbolic and cultural themes—prosperity, longevity, and moral cultivation—that are deeply embedded in local traditions. Visitors experience an immersive sensory environment in which the lingering fragrance of wood converges with the intricate rhythm of carved motifs, generating an atmosphere at once classical and majestic. As Liu Yan observes, these artistic crystallizations—infused with aesthetic sensibilities, technical mastery, and intellectual legacy—silently enrich cultural perception and artistic cultivation [6].

The decorative repertoire of residential wood sculpture encompasses a remarkably diverse range of motifs, reflecting both the breadth of cultural imagination and the depth of symbolic articulation. These motifs are commonly grouped into figures, animals, plants, objects, and geometric designs, each imbued with auspicious connotations that resonate with collective cultural aspirations [7]. Ornamentation, as Zhang Lu contends, is not an optional adjunct to architecture but an essential component of its identity; together with space and structure, decorative motifs constitute a unified architectural whole. The intentional placement of motifs within architectural components demonstrates both the refinement of craftsmanship and the conscious pursuit of symbolic order [8]. Even in contemporary contexts, these practices remain valuable cultural assets that continue to inspire new architectural design paradigms [9].

The materiality of wood further enhances its symbolic and aesthetic significance. Its natural grain, color, and tactile qualities embody an unadorned beauty rooted in nature, providing not only visual and tactile satisfaction but also evoking tranquility, warmth, and intimacy on a spiritual level. This intertwining of material and artistry recalls Wang Guowei's remark: "When I look at things, they are imbued with my colors." Once transformed through craftsmanship, wood becomes more than raw material—it evolves into an externalization of inner aesthetic awareness. As Meng Xiangji notes, reverence for nature and the unity of mind and hand converge at the moment when blade meets wood, embedding creativity and craftsmanship into each carved piece [10]. At this intersection of imagination and technique, the essence of beauty is revealed, allowing traditional wood sculpture to persist as both an artistic practice and a cultural legacy.

From a theoretical perspective, Chinese traditional aesthetics situates beauty in the unity of form and spirit, where external elegance corresponds to symbolic resonance [11]. This dialectical relationship between form and meaning underscores that artistic value emerges not merely from visual appeal but from its ability to communicate cultural ideals. Similarly argued that aesthetic experience arises from the interplay of unity, complexity, and intensity—a framework that resonates strongly with *lianjia* carvings, whose symmetrical structures, intricate motifs, and layered ornamental patterns stimulate both visual and emotional engagement [12]. Further emphasized that art transcends form by investing objects with metaphorical meaning and stylistic transformation. In this regard, carved curtain racks in traditional Chinese architecture exemplify how boundary-defining components are elevated into symbolic articulations of cultural identity, operating as carriers of aesthetic value, historical memory, and collective ethos [13]. From an anthropological standpoint, Gell highlighted that art functions as a system of social communication, transmitting symbolic meaning rather than existing solely for aesthetic pleasure [14]. The motifs of *lianjia*—floral scrolls, auspicious emblems, narrative scenes, and geometric arrangements—embody this role, functioning as visual narratives of cultural belief systems and cosmological worldviews. In this sense, *lianjia* carvings exemplify the convergence of aesthetics, material culture, and symbolic communication, offering a unique lens for understanding the interrelationship between artistic form, craftsmanship, and cultural heritage in traditional Chinese architecture.

3.1 Combination patterns of animals and plants

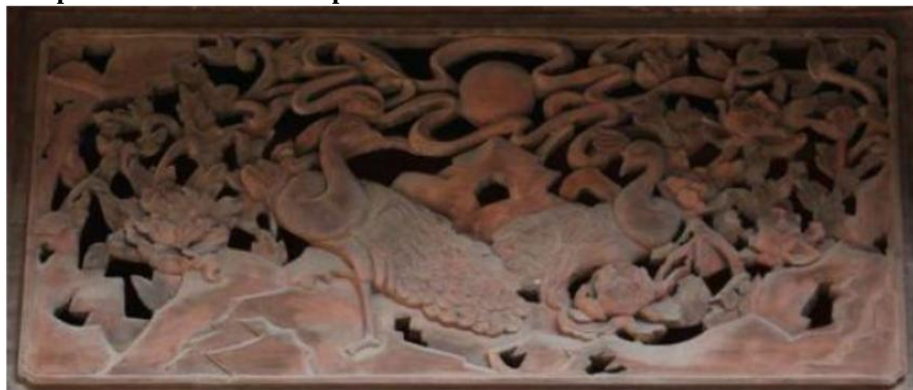


Figure 1: The phoenix plays with the peony

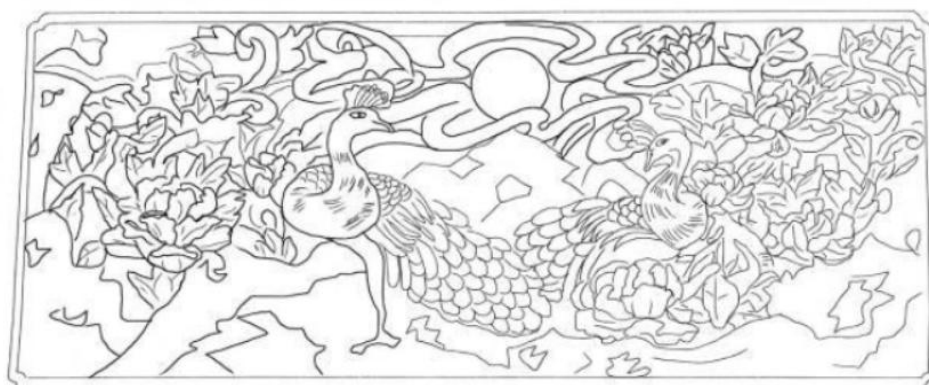


Figure 2: The phoenix plays with the peony (Hand-drawn)

The Lianjia "Phoenix Playing with Peony" showcases the typical beauty of lines and modeling characteristics found in Jinzhong wood sculpture. The phoenix wings are outlined with fine and elastic curves, with each feather distinctly marked and slightly undulating, achieving a balance between magnificence and vitality in the overall image. The peony petals are stacked in curved lines, creating an outwardly broad and inwardly narrowed form that emphasizes the blooming posture, while the swirling branches and leaves enhance the life-like quality of the image. The overall use of lines presents a rhythm of "loose and dense," with the swirling lines of clouds and the sun's rotation in the upper part echoing the horizontally extending branches and leaves in the lower part, strengthening the rhythm and vitality of the composition. This sense of rhythm of the lines precisely embodies Clive Bell's theory of "salient form", that is, the beauty of art does not stem from imitation, but from the pure aesthetic emotions aroused by the relationship between lines, shapes and rhythms. The swirling clouds above and the flowing branches and leaves together form a visual rhythm of "alternating density and sparseness", creating a sense of flowing energy and visual rhythm.

The modeling of the phoenixes demonstrates dynamic tension and grace: one bird extends its wings upward as if about to soar, while the other faces it in poised interaction. The peony blossoms, with their thickly layered petals, exhibit a volumetric quality that contrasts with the linear delicacy of the feathers. Through this juxtaposition, the carving achieves a sense of spatial dialogue between movement and stillness. The rectangular layout is horizontally extended, with the visual axis slightly offset to the left, establishing a counterbalanced composition in which the rising sun and clouds at the top symbolize heaven, and the symmetrical peonies below represent the earthly realm. This three-layer spatial sequence—"Heaven, Flora, and Birds"—embodies the traditional cosmological concept of harmony between heaven and humanity. This progressive composition from top to bottom not only enriches the depth of the image but also embodies the aesthetic principles of "centered balance" and "auspicious unity" in traditional Chinese decorative art [15].

In terms of carving techniques and symbolic meaning, the Lianjia combines high relief and openwork techniques. The phoenix body and peony flowers are shaped with high relief, with finely carved edges on the feathers and petals, creating a strong sense of three-dimensionality and contrast between light and shadow. The background cloud patterns and branches are treated with openwork carving, enhancing the transparency and spatial layers of the image, facilitating interaction between the indoor and outdoor spaces, in line with the "unity of void and reality" feature in traditional wooden decoration [16]. The art form itself is a bridge between perception and meaning. Here, the carving technique not only conforms to the structural logic but also embodies the aesthetic spirit of decorative art.

Regarding the subject matter, the phoenix has historically symbolized auspiciousness and nobility, while the peony represents wealth and prosperity. The combination of the two conveys the auspicious meaning of "Phoenix arriving with grace, the country flourishing and the people in peace, wealth and prosperity." It reflects the decorative concept that "where there is a pattern, there is meaning, and where there is meaning, there is auspiciousness" [17]. According to Saussure's semiotic theory, these carved images can be regarded as a symbolic system, in which the connection between the "signifier" and the "signified" constitutes the core of symbolic expression. The combination of the phoenix and the peony transcends the level of natural reproduction and becomes a cultural code, conveying the moral ideals and aesthetic concepts of the Shanxi merchant society in the Qing Dynasty. As a decorative component in the interior, the Lianjia not only serves a visual decorative function but also carries the family's prayers and cultural identity. It reflects the Qing Dynasty Jin merchant culture's admiration for auspiciousness and wealth, and reveals the intertwined cultural logic of "material symbols—auspiciousness—ethics" in traditional Chinese wood sculpture [18].

3.2 Combination patterns of Humans and plants



Figure 3: The Eight Barbarians Presenting Treasures



Figure 4: The Eight Barbarians Presenting Treasures (Hand-drawn)

The curtain frame of The Eight Barbarians Presenting Treasures in the Wang Grand Courtyard measures 1.59 meters in width and 3.92 meters in height, with the central decorative pattern depicting eight Hu people dressed in diverse costumes moving among mountains, rocks, and trees. Their curly hair, deep-set eyes, prominent noses, and delicate beards, together with their narrow-sleeved garments and knee-high boots, convey the typical appearance of the Hu people. Each figure holds a treasure such as rhinoceros horn or coral—rare items from the Central Plains—expressing a vivid and cheerful demeanor. The theme of “foreigners presenting treasures” (胡人识宝 or 胡人献宝) became widespread from the Sui and Tang dynasties onward, when commercial exchanges between Central China and Western regions flourished. The depiction of standing or kneeling Hu people holding precious items like corals, vases, or jewels originated from Gandharan and Indian artistic traditions and entered Chinese visual culture as early as the Western Han dynasty through tributary exchanges involving glassware and other luxury goods. From the Han and Wei dynasties onward, official tributes consisted of exquisite and unique objects from afar—ranging from animals and minerals to textiles and crafts—symbolizing the empire’s political authority and cultural inclusiveness.

Literary sources from the Six Dynasties to the Tang further popularized the motif of “Hu people identifying treasures,” portraying Persian and other Western-region merchants as connoisseurs of rare goods and symbols of exotic prosperity. By the Ming and Qing periods, the phrase “Persians presenting treasures” had entered everyday parlance, reflecting both the persistence of foreign trade and the imaginative transformation of cross-cultural encounters into auspicious visual symbols. As the Qing empire consolidated its power, tributary rituals and artistic imagery of foreign envoys offering gifts became important emblems of imperial grandeur and cosmopolitanism [19].

The carving of this Lianjia adopts a horizontal rectangular framework as its basic structure, with the composition following a balanced arrangement of “central prominence, with flanking elements in response.” Three figures with wide garments and dignified postures occupy the central position, becoming the visual focus; the figures on both sides surround the center and adopt different postures, forming a typical group narrative structure. The upper part is filled with lush and intertwined branches and leaves, which correspond with the swirling grass patterns in the lower part, creating a clear sense of layering that gives the composition the structure of “Heaven above, Earth below.” This orderly treatment not only enhances the stability of the image but also aligns with the functional role of wood carving in constructing narrative and visual rhythm in interior or intermediary spaces [20].

In terms of modeling, the differences in the figures' postures and their distinct social statuses are fully emphasized. The central figure, through a dignified posture and central placement, embodies authority and respect, while the figures on both sides hold objects and face the central figure, creating a ritualistic scene of “worship” or “tribute.” Although the facial features are simplified, the stylized treatment of clothing, gestures, and actions effectively conveys social hierarchy and narrative meaning. This figure-centered composition is commonly interwoven with symbolic themes in regional wood carving practices [21]. Surrounding elements, such as rocks and branches, are carved in a freehand, layered perspective style, enriching the space and contrasting with the figures, thus emphasizing the central figures' significance.

The use of lines in the overall composition exhibits a distinct rhythm and decorative logic. The flowing curves of the figures' clothing present variations in density, forming a sense of rhythm. The curling and interwoven plant patterns enhance the movement of the composition, maintaining visual continuity as the composition expands horizontally. As research on traditional wood carving narrative images points out, woodcut images participate in the “narrative production” of space through compositional and line-drawing rhythms, thus transforming decorative elements into an integral part of spatial experience.

On the thematic level, the central figure's respectful posture and the surrounding figures' encircling relationships embody hierarchical order and ceremonial spirit, reflecting family ethics, patriarchal norms, and the representation of social identity. The lush branches and flowers symbolize "prosperity and flourishing, with extended branches," carrying the auspicious meaning of family prosperity and generational succession [20]. Furthermore, as a visible and integrated decorative element within the architectural space, the Lianjia also serves the functions of visual separation, light filtration, and cultural memory. Recent research on the preservation and digital archiving of wood carvings has further emphasized the informational value and replicability of such components in cultural heritage preservation [22].

In conclusion, the organic integration of composition, modeling, linework, and symbolism in this Lianjia not only reflects the aesthetic procedural and narrative qualities of traditional wood scul but also facilitates the transmission of cultural meanings through coded decorative language. It thus serves as a typical component in the architectural art of Wang Grand Courtyard, embodying both aesthetic value and cultural memory [23].

3.3 Combination pattern of objects and geometric patter



Figure 5: Mixed treasure pattern



Figure 6: Mixed treasure pattern (Hand-drawn)

Located in Piaoxiangju of the Wang Grand Courtyard, the Lianjia exemplifies the aesthetic sophistication of Jinzhong wood sculpture in its form, technique, and symbolic meaning. Its overall composition and linear configuration manifest a distinctive balance between rigidity and fluidity. The outer frame is structured with continuous key patterns, creating a rigorous geometric grid that defines the visual order of the entire piece. This geometric boundary not only serves the functional purpose of spatial demarcation but also reflects the traditional Chinese decorative aesthetic of "order as beauty," in which symmetry and structure embody moral and visual harmony. The central incense burner, floral vases, and ritual vessels feature full, rounded contours with smooth flowing lines, demonstrating the artisans' precise control of material texture and rhythmic balance. The cloud and scrolling grass patterns, composed of gentle curves, contrast with the static forms of the central objects, generating a dynamic sense of rhythm and layered spatiality. This interplay of "curves within rectilinearity" typifies the Qing-dynasty aesthetic taste found in Jin merchants' mansions, combining rational order with living vitality [24].

Compositional analysis reveals that the Lianjia adopts a horizontal rectangular layout organized along a symmetrical central axis, producing a strong sense of balance and progression. The incense burner occupies the visual center, while vases, ruyi scepters, antiques, and scrolling grass motifs are symmetrically distributed on either side, forming a rhythmic expansion from the core to the periphery. The geometric key patterns along the upper and lower borders visually converge the composition, reinforcing the aesthetic of "central equilibrium."

This symmetrical organization corresponds with the axial order prevalent in Chinese ritual architecture, embodying the Confucian ideals of *li* (propriety) and *xu* (hierarchical order) that informed the moral and spatial principles of elite domestic architecture in the Qing dynasty.

Iconographically, the Lianjia belongs to the decorative category of “antiques and elegant objects.” Each motif carries distinct auspicious connotations: the vase (*ping*) symbolizes peace, the tripod denotes nobility and stability, while the incense burner and *ruyi* scepter signify auspicious completeness and harmony. Together, these motifs construct a symbolic system integrating literati refinement with mercantile aspiration. They reflect the Wang family’s desire for prosperity, longevity, and familial harmony [25], revealing how moral cultivation and material success were seen as mutually reinforcing ideals in Qing merchant culture. Within the visual program of the Wang Grand Courtyard, such motifs function not merely as ornamental images but as material embodiments of ethical and cosmological order—visible forms through which invisible moral values were conveyed.

Of particular note is the Fang Sheng pattern carved into the upper right corner of the *lianjia*. Composed of two interlocking rhombuses, Fang Sheng embodies a dual significance: it symbolizes “victory” and “excellence,” while its intersecting angles represent “unity of heart and virtue.” The term *fang* (“square”) itself operates as both a formal and ethical metaphor. In visual terms, the square signifies rectitude and stability; in moral philosophy, it denotes uprightness and self-discipline. In contrast to the circle, which symbolizes fluidity and adaptation, the square represents the rational and ordered principle of the cosmos. Fang Sheng patterns often appear independently or in combination with panel borders to form continuous or nested compositions, and they are frequently incorporated into the Eight Treasures (*babao*) system. Its inclusion within the *Lianjia* enriches the decorative vocabulary of the composition, embedding moral virtue and auspicious symbolism into a geometric structure that mediates between order and grace.

In terms of technique, the main objects are executed in medium to high relief, characterized by rounded volumes and full contours, while the scrolling grass patterns and ornamental details are rendered in shallow relief. Certain cloud patterns are carved in openwork, allowing the interplay of light and shadow to animate the surface. This combination of “void and solidity” and “dense–sparse contrast” enhances the depth and spatial layering of the composition. It also reveals the sophisticated understanding of visual rhythm and spatial dynamics possessed by Jinzhong artisans [26]. The technical complexity and precision of these carvings elevate the *lianjia* from a functional architectural element to an autonomous work of visual art, where structure and ornament achieve aesthetic unity.

Overall, the Piaoxiangju *Lianjia* represents the synthesis of geometric discipline, symbolic meaning, and artisanal virtuosity. It embodies a visual system that unites rational order with moral symbolism, aligning aesthetic pleasure with ethical cultivation. Through its measured composition and intricate carving, the piece not only exemplifies the decorative artistry of Qing merchant residences but also illuminates the cultural logic underpinning traditional Chinese craftsmanship—an integration of visual order, ethical ideals, and spiritual aspiration. The beauty of this *lianjia* lies not only in its technical mastery but also in its capacity to convey values of harmony, virtue, and peace, serving as a paradigmatic example of how “ritual aesthetics” and “symbolic aesthetics” were harmoniously merged within the architectural art of the Wang Grand Courtyard.

3.4 Combination of characters, animals and plants



Figure 7: Qian Jixuan



Figure 8: Qian Jixuan (Hand-drawn)

This *lianjia* panel from the Ningruiju section of the Wang Grand Courtyard exemplifies the refined craftsmanship and symbolic artistry characteristic of Jinzhong woodcarving traditions. The composition is structured within a horizontally rectangular frame, in which the visual narrative unfolds with balance and vitality. The lines are fluid and rhythmic, seamlessly transitioning between curved and angular forms. The delicate interlacing of plum blossoms, bamboo stalks, and ginkgo leaves creates an aesthetic of “motion within stillness,” echoing Zong Baihua’s concept that Chinese art embodies “liveliness within order” [27].

In modeling, the artisan employs stylized realism to render the natural forms. The deer, poised with an arched body and uplifted head, conveys vitality and auspiciousness, while the surrounding flora—plum, bamboo, and ginkgo—construct a layered system of moral symbolism. Each plant embodies distinct virtues: the plum stands for purity, the bamboo for integrity, and the ginkgo for longevity. The bird perched among the branches reinforces the theme of vitality and harmony between humans and nature.

The compositional arrangement follows the “central prominence with flanking balance” principle, with the deer and bird as focal points and the vegetal motifs serving as visual anchors that guide the viewer’s gaze. Negative space is carved with precision to allow the interplay of light and shadow, producing spatial depth that reflects the aesthetic of “emptiness and substance in mutual generation.” Such treatment resonates with the philosophical linkage between natural imagery and moral cultivation central to traditional Chinese aesthetics.

Technically, the carving demonstrates the integration of *yangke* (relief carving) and *louke* (openwork carving), a hallmark of Qing-period decorative woodwork. The front surfaces of the motifs are rounded and polished to create tactile softness, while the recesses and undercuts produce contrast and spatial layering. This combination enhances the visual depth and allows air and light to pass through, giving the frame a dynamic transparency. The wood—likely elm or cypress commonly used in Shanxi dwellings—shows subtle textural grains that have been intentionally preserved to harmonize with the carving’s organic imagery. Over time, the patina has darkened, emphasizing the temporal beauty of age and craftsmanship. These qualities together embody the Northern Chinese artisans’ pursuit of both technical excellence and moral resonance through material expression.

Thematically, the panel conveys auspicious meanings through its symbolic imagery: the deer (*lu*) as a homophone for “emolument,” combined with birds and blossoms representing joy, prosperity, and longevity. Beyond decoration, it expresses the homeowner’s aspirations for moral refinement and familial prosperity. This synthesis of symbolic narrative, craftsmanship, and philosophical aesthetic reflects the integration of art, ethics, and daily life in traditional residential architecture.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the wood sculpture in traditional Chinese architecture, particularly within the context of Jinzhong’s vernacular dwellings and the iconic Wang Grand Courtyard, serves as a profound testament to the integration of aesthetic and functional values in architectural ornamentation. As illustrated through the analysis of various ornamental components such as the curtain racks, these carvings go far beyond mere decorative elements, embodying symbolic narratives that encapsulate cultural beliefs, social order, and familial aspirations. Through motifs like the phoenix and peony, as well as human figures and auspicious symbols, the carvings not only convey cultural ideals but also act as visual articulations of historical and social identities, reflecting the collective ethos of the region’s heritage.

The carving techniques employed—ranging from high relief to openwork—further enhance these symbolic themes, adding a tangible layer of depth and interaction between the carved motifs and the

surrounding environment. The craftsmanship of these works, whether through the fluidity of line or the rhythmic precision of compositional elements, reveals a seamless integration of artistry and technical mastery. The use of wood, with its organic texture and natural beauty, also infuses these sculptures with a spiritual warmth that amplifies their symbolic and cultural resonance.

Moreover, the synthesis of form and meaning in these decorative elements highlights the core principles of Chinese traditional aesthetics, where the unity of form and spirit underpins the aesthetic experience. As such, these wood carvings fulfill a dual role: they contribute to the visual narrative of the architecture while simultaneously preserving and transmitting cultural and ethical values across generations. The enduring appeal and significance of these carvings in contemporary times underscore their role as both aesthetic objects and cultural artifacts, underscoring their continuing relevance in modern architectural design.

In essence, the wood sculptures of the Wang Grand Courtyard offer a unique lens through which to understand the intricate relationship between art, culture, and space in traditional Chinese architecture. As a form of cultural expression, they stand as both a reminder of the past and a source of inspiration for future artistic endeavors. Through their preservation and study, we continue to uncover the rich tapestry of meanings embedded in these works, ensuring that their cultural significance endures in the fabric of contemporary society.

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