

# **The Production Structure of Hunan Confucian Temple Cultural Space -Taking Ningyuan Confucian Temple as an Example**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

Confucian Temple is not only a substantial space in the traditional sense, but also a spatial entity for cultural creation and inheritance. It is a typical cultural space with cultural, spatial and temporal characteristics. Taking Ningyuan Confucian Temple in Yongzhou, Hunan Province as an example, this paper studies the production structure of ancient Chinese cultural space applying the social space production theory of French philosopher Lefebvre and other domestic and foreign cultural space research theories. Three Confucian temples in Hunan were investigated on the spot, namely Shimen Confucian Temple, Lizhou Confucian Temple and Ningyuan Confucian Temple. Based on the data obtained from the field survey, the components and cultural implications of Dacheng Hall of Confucian Temple were explored. Taking Ningyuan Confucian Temple as an example, the production process and structure of cultural space of Hunan Confucian Temple were analyzed.

**Keywords:** Hunan Confucian Temple; Space Production; Cultural Space

## **Introduction**

Since the 1960s and 1970s, scholars at home and abroad have made great breakthroughs in space cognition and research. Scholars no longer continue their original simple understanding of space, but rethink the role of space in the construction of daily life. They begin to pay more attention to the subject behavior and space ontology in space, and explore the role of space in the construction of subject behavior and psychology. Space gradually becomes an empirical fact of social life, which constitutes the representation of empirical phenomena (Tang Chendi, 2017). In ancient China, the traditional architecture with Confucian temples and academies as the core contains China's very valuable educational and cultural heritage. It is not only the physical place of cultural space, but also has typical cultural production characteristics, which is cultural, spatial and temporal, and is worth in-depth research and excavation.

Shelter is the most primitive meaning of architecture. In the primitive society, our ancestors had extremely low ability to transform nature. Living in natural caves, they only wanted to shelter from wind and rain. With the continuous development of society and the progress of technology, architectural space is gradually defined.

During this period, the concept of internal space was mainly limited to actual internal space, this concept dominates the development direction of the West and other countries in the world. It involves the similar meaning of the Lao Tzu's saying in China that “Mold clay into a vessel, from its not-being (in the vessel’s hollow), arises the utility of the vessel. Cut out doors and windows in the house (-wall), from their not-being (empty space) arises the utility of the house. Therefore by the existence of things we profit. And by the non-existence of things we are served.” (Lao Tzu, Tao and Teh, translated by Ling Yutang )

In architecture, architectural space refers to the general designation of internal space and external space formed by various main elements and forms of architecture in order to meet the needs of people's production or life. The internal space of a building refers to the physical part of the building entity, which is mainly composed of doors, windows, columns, beams, floors, walls and other structural components. The external environment of a building refers to the space environment enclosed by several buildings outside the building entity, mainly including roads, water bodies, plants, landscape facilities and other elements. It belongs to the category of urban space, also known as the external environment of users' outdoor activities or external environment of a building.

In a broad sense, architectural space includes all spaces limited by the existence of buildings, such as urban space, external space and internal space of buildings. The narrow sense of architectural space refers specifically to the internal space of the building.

The application of the above space concepts is to objects. However, once anything is used by humans, it will have cultural functions, including spiritual content. In addition, what is related to physical space is cultural space. In fact, at the beginning of the birth of human civilization, architectural space has been endowed with cultural connotation. From the structural characteristics of Chinese traditional architectural space, the cultural concept implied therein can be found. Chinese traditional rites and rituals are epitomized in the form of single architectural space:

The limitation of building type, for example, some buildings can only be owned or used by the Son of Heaven, which is recorded in the Biography of Gongyang that only the Son of Heaven can use Lingtai (a platform) to observe the celestial phenomena; Another example is that only the Son of Heaven can use the Danqi (red steps) in the Confucian Temple.

Restrictions on architectural color and decoration, such as yellow glazed tiles can only be used for royal buildings, and dragons can only be used for decoration on beams and columns of royal buildings.

The scale and size of the buildings, for example, are limited as follows in the Tang Dynasty (the order for camp repair): the number of houses for officials of the third grade shall not exceed five rooms and nine shelves, and the number of houses for officials of the fifth grade and above shall not exceed five rooms and seven shelves.

Up to now, the space research of the Confucian Temple has mainly focused on the physical properties of space. In recent years, some studies have focused on the cultural and spiritual attributes of Confucian Temple space, but they still ignore the impact of space on social relations and social construction. Although people have noticed the impact of space on personal behavior and psychology, they have not noticed the “productive” nature of space, that

is, breaking through physical space and expanding to the outside in the form of spiritual space.

Since the 1960s, the western space research has turned to the research of space production, and its founder is H. Lefebvre. In the 1970s, Lefebvre, in his book *Production of Space*, pioneered the theory of social space production, overturning the idea that space is only the place or background where social practice takes place, but regarded space and its production as the product of the evolution and construction of social relations, and put forward the theoretical framework of a triad of space production, namely spatial practice, representation of space and representational space.

Therefore, some scholars applied space production to the study of architectural space. Zhang Jingxiang used space production theory to study the shaping of Modern and contemporary consumer space in many domestic cities in his journal paper "Interpretation of the Shaping of Modern and Contemporary Consumer Space in Cities - Based on the Analysis Perspective of Space Production Theory". It is pointed out that the essence of this kind of space shaping is actually a profitable space production behavior, rather than a real historical block and architectural protection (Zhang, 2009). In his master's thesis, Yin Tong used the theory of space production to study the cultural space of historical blocks, and discussed the power game and conflict of each space subject behind the culture. However, there are still some deficiencies in the analysis of cultural space, lacking in-depth research on the cultural connotation of historical blocks (Yin, 2018).

At present, many Confucian Temple architecture researchers focus their research on the Confucian Temple in the field of their own discipline, focusing on the construction and evolution history of the Confucian Temple architectural space, lacking the use of other disciplines to explore the cultural value of Confucian Temple space, and ignoring the related research on the cultural space production around the Confucian Temple.

Therefore, space production provides us with a new perspective to study traditional architecture, brings us new ideas to continue the traditional architectural design culture and carry out modern design, constructs the public space design concept based on the national social and cultural tradition.

## **Research Object**

1. Analyze the space production structure of Confucian Temple by taking Ningyuan Confucian Temple as an object.
2. Bring inspiration to the design of modern public activity space through the production structure of Confucian Temple space.

## **Literature Review**

Confucianism occupies the core position in Chinese culture. As a physical building under the spirit of Confucianism, Confucian Temple has been widely studied by scholars. These studies mainly focus on the following aspects:

In terms of history, mainly taking time as the axis, it studies the historical development process from the birth of Confucius thought to the birth of Confucius temples, and then to the construction of local Confucius temples. Representative studies include Qu Yingjie's *The*

Historical Tale of Confucius Temple, which shows the development history of China's existing Confucian temples and Confucius temples in East and Southeast Asia (Qu, 2011), and the collection of papers of the first Confucius and Confucian Temple Symposium of the Sichuan Confucius Research Association, which discusses Confucius and traditional culture, Confucius' educational thought, Confucius and the construction of spiritual civilization, and the history, function, protection and utilization of Confucian temples (Wei, 1991).

In terms of social culture, Zhang Bingjuan pointed out in his paper *The Confucian Temple Sacrifice System in the History of Communication and Its Contemporary Value* that the Confucian Temple is not only a sacrificial space, but also a cultural carrier, and it is also the embodiment of the Chinese sacrificial ritual system. By studying the cultural transmission function of the Confucian Temple Sacrifice System, it will play an important role in enhancing cultural confidence and building a cultural community (Zhang, 2018). Xu Yingying's *Trial Analysis of the Educational Function of Fujian Confucian Temple Sacrifice in the Ming Dynasty* shows the educational function of respecting teachers, honoring virtue and rewarding merit, and superiority and inferiority ranking during Fujian Confucian Temple Sacrifice (Xu, 2016).

In the aspect of architectural art, it covers the aspects of architectural plane layout, architectural landscape, architectural structure, architectural decoration, etc. Representative studies include Peng Rong's *Preliminary Study on Chinese Confucian Temples*, which discusses the landscape environment, architectural layout, plant layout, roads, squares and architectural sketches of Confucian Temples (Peng, 2008), and Chen Lei's *Preliminary Study on Colored Paintings of Qisheng Temple in Qufu Confucian Temples*, which discusses the basic shape and structure, age and artistic characteristics of the colored paintings of Qufu Confucian Temples.

Through the study of the above literature, it is found that many current Confucian Temple architecture researchers focus their research on the Confucian temple in the field of their own discipline, paying attention to the research on the construction and evolution history of Confucian Temple architectural space, lacking the use of other disciplines to explore the cultural value of Confucian Temple space, and neglecting the relevant research on the production of cultural space around the Confucian Temple.

## **Research Methodology**

This research mainly adopts the qualitative research method of field survey. Through participatory observation, interview, architectural mapping and other actual investigations, the architectural form, spatial characteristics and cultural connotation of the Confucian Temple are analyzed. The investigation contents include the relationship between the shape and terrain of the Confucian Temple, construction time, production mode, social structure, etc. In the field survey of the Confucian Temple, the researchers started from three aspects. (1) Collect, sort out, verify and analyze relevant historical documents and materials, and sort out the relevant historical events and main processes of the construction of Ningyuan Confucian Temple. A large number of field surveys, social surveys and oral materials of Ningyuan Confucian Temple were supplemented to analyze and study the right structure of Ningyuan Confucian Temple and part of the production mode under the right. (2) The building space structure, symbol production, aesthetic production and the size of the nodes of the main buildings of Ningyuan Confucian Temple are mainly analyzed through the methods of realistic mapping records and Confucian Temple maintenance drawings. (3) With the help of UAV, 3D images are used to

obtain terrain, landform, building top view and other information. The UAV can take aerial photos by positioning the coordinates of the building through GPS. The wide-angle lens is used to obtain 360 degree aerial photos, and the data are processed to generate the structural position of the Confucian Temple and the local geographic space.

## **Research Results**

### ***The Right Structure of Ningyuan Confucian Temple***

Ningyuan Confucian Temple, the largest and best preserved Confucian Temple in the six provinces in central and southern China, is well known for an old saying: “Qufu Confucian Temple in the north and Ningyuan Confucian Temple in the south”. The book Hunan General Annals compiled at the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China called Ningyuan Confucian Temple “the largest Confucian Temple in Hunan”, and it is also now the most completely protected and largest Confucian Temple in the six provinces in central and southern China. Ningyuan Confucian Temple was built in the Song Dynasty and renovated many times during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, featuring multiple dynasty styles. Through relevant research, it is found that the right structure of Ningyuan Confucian Temple can be divided into the following aspects:

### ***Political Right Space***

In 965 AD, the Emperor of the Song Dynasty Zhao Kuangyin's serious danger – Houshu Dynasty in the south finally wiped out. The south was basically peaceful, and the small county town where Zhao Kuangyin renamed the small county town of Lingdao as Ningyuan, which means “the success is achieved by military force, peace is obtained in the distance”. Then a new town in Ningyuan was built by massive construction. “Ningyuan Confucian Temple was built in the Tang Dynasty, fifty miles to the east of the old county in Lingdao, Han Dynasty. Lingdao was renamed as Ningyuan during the reign of Emperor Zhao Kuangyin of the Song Dynasty, and moved to the school palace built today, 20 miles to the southwest of the county” (Ningyuan County Annals, 2007). The relocation of Ningyuan Confucian Temple from the former site of the Tang Dynasty to the central area of Ningyuan County during the Song Dynasty stabilized the society, pacified the people, and played a great role in the ruler's management of remote areas, the worship of Confucianism and preaching, and the enlightenment of the people. The practice of physical space represents an expansion of national rights. In terms of the China's space culture, the center is rights.

### ***Economic Right Space***

Ningyuan County Annals records: “In the second year of Hongwu in the former Ming Dynasty, Zhu Gongqing, the magistrate of the county, built the Ningyuan Confucian Temple on the old site.” This reconstruction featured some square and generous construction style of the early Ming Dynasty. “In the early years of Hongxi, the magistrate Liu Tong rebuilt it”. In this reconstruction, a stone building on the original ground was built, and a new Ningyuan Confucian Temple rose from the ground. After many repairs during the reign of Emperor Hongzhi and Emperor Jiajing of Ming Dynasty, Ningyuan Confucian Temple began to face the world with a new look. The use of stone system, on the one hand, is a manifestation of economic strength, but also the strengthening of political power under the support of economic power. The changes in materials and vision endow the Confucian Temple with a more solid, noble, oppressive spiritual temperament, strengthening the physical space of the Confucian Temple, but also reshaped the psychological space of the local people.

According to historical records, in the 12th year of Tongzhi reign in the Qing Dynasty, Huang Xirong, the staff member, donated silver to rebuild the Confucian Temple, raised more than 60,000 liang of silver, and completed the project in the eighth year of Guangxu. The Confucian Temple covers an area of 7,000 square meters, becoming the “largest in Hunan” at that time (Ma Ning, 2005). Generally Speaking, the entire Ningyuan Confucian Temple has a rigorous structure with a large scale, fine carving and rich connotation, giving a sense of solemnity, simplicity and majesty, which reflects the unique regional architectural style. Ningyuan Confucian Temple, with its magnificence and large scale, shows its economic hegemony compared with ordinary private buildings.

***Social Relations Leading Space***

The construction of the Confucian Temple in the Ming and Qing Dynasties explained that the imperial examination system in feudal society reached its peak at this time. In modern times, the imperial examination system died under the impact of western culture and the turbulent social change. The nature of the Confucian Temple has also had a huge shock with the transformation of ideological system of Chinese traditional culture, and has begun to undergo earth shaking changes. After the demise of the Qing Dynasty, Ningyuan Confucian Temple experienced the “public education library”, labor unions, farmers' associations, factories, primary schools, school buildings, granaries, etc. It was not until 1989 that the restoration was officially carried out, and it became a scenic spot specially for sightseeing.

The relationship between the main sacrifice and the matching sacrifice in the statues of Dacheng Hall, and the introduction of the local matching sacrifice in the local Confucian temples, gives the local people a kind of guidance, and the annual specific Confucius worship ceremony also strengthens the leading relationship in social life.



**Fig.1** Shimen Confucian Temple under maintenance (source: the author's photography)

As the core building of the Confucian Temple, Dacheng Hall is also the focus of every Confucian temple reconstruction. Through this survey, it is found that not only the Ningyuan Confucian Temple, but also the Shimen Confucian Temple and Lizhou Confucian Temple have carried out a lot of maintenance and repair work. Among the three Confucian temples, the Ningyuan Confucian Temple and Lizhou Confucian Temple are the most

complete, and the Shimen Confucian Temple is just under repair (see Fig. 1). Lizhou Confucian Temple has been well preserved due to the coexistence with the Lixian Museum in the later period. Due to coexistence, the Dacheng Hall was previously transformed into a two-story space and added with the conference function. Later, the previous structure was demolished, restoring the original appearance of the Confucian Temple. However, part of the space of the Confucian Temple is still used as a museum display (see Fig. 2).



**Fig.2** Lizhou Confucian Temple coexisting with the museum (source: the author's photography)

### ***The Right Production Mode of Ningyuan Confucian Temple***

The representation of space is a process of cultural meaning practice that uses various symbols to represent concepts, ideas, and emotions, and can convey its rich meaning to others (Zhang, 2017). As a representation of space, the space production mode of Ningyuan Confucian Temple is mainly composed of the following production modes:

### ***The Education Production of Ningyuan Confucian Temple***

The space structure of Ningyuan Confucian Temple is relatively complete in the national Confucian Temple buildings. The whole building adopts the symmetrical layout of the central axis, which reflects the strict hierarchy. From south to north, they are: Wanren Palace Wall, Panchi Lake, Lingxing Gate, Dacheng Gate, Dacheng Hall and Qisheng Temple. Behind each building is the profound educational thought of Confucianism.

Here, take Dacheng Hall as an example for a brief analysis. Dacheng Hall is the core building of Ningyuan Confucian Temple. The name of Dacheng Hall means Confucius is a master. The arrangement of its internal sacrificial objects represents the Dacheng Hall as a patriarchal space emphasizing primary and secondary superiority. The wooden statue of Confucius, the “teacher of all ages”, is located in the middle of the Dacheng Hall, with sitting figures of “four sages” on both sides. On the left is Fusheng Yan Hui (Continuator of the Sage), Shusheng Kong Ji. On the right are Zongsheng Zeng Shen and Yasheng Meng Ke. Although in different historical periods, the people and numbers venerated in Confucian temples changed, the order of superiority and inferiority embodied in them could not be subverted. (Yuan, 2003) The position order of the sacrificial personnel in Dacheng Hall reflects the occurrence mechanism of Lefebvre's “social space production of identity”.

### ***The Symbol Production of Ningyuan Confucian Temple***

Ningyuan Confucian Temple is mainly built based on the prototype of Confucian Temple in Qufu, Shandong Province, but it has the characteristics of Hunan and Chu culture. At the same time, Ningyuan people especially like to use themes such as famous Confucians, loyalty, filial piety, immortality and seclusion, and folk customs in the decoration, sculpture and painting of the Confucian Temple, and show them through the expression of local folk customs in Ningyuan.

The Confucian Temple in Hunan Province maintains the characteristics of the Confucian Temple in Qufu, Shandong Province on the whole, but it has the regional characteristics of Hunan Province. Through the investigation of the Dacheng Hall, it is not difficult to find that there are many local sculptures in Hunan Province on the plinths under the columns of the Dacheng Hall, and the carving works also have local characteristics (Fig. 3). There are many auspicious patterns and stories carved on the doors and windows of Dacheng Hall. These patterns are derived from local stories in Hunan Province and Taoyuan wood carving technology, with distinctive local characteristics (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4** Decoration on the door leaves of Dacheng Hall (source: the author's photography)

Among the three Confucian temples surveyed in Ningyuan Confucian Temple, the most distinctive one is the dragon columns of Dacheng Hall. These columns are not found in other Confucian temples in Hunan Province. In terms of their appearance, they are more slender, delicate and elegant, just like the typical southern garden style. The artistic conception of the Confucian Temple is more like a fairyland by depicting the soaring dragon and phoenix. The dragon and phoenix also imply that after reading the “Book of Sages”, one can pass the examination with its name put on the published list of successful candidates, enjoy good luck, be rich and noble, etc. (Figure 5).





**Fig. 5** Dragon Columns of Dacheng Hall (Source: the author's photography)

***Folk Custom Production of Ningyuan Confucian Temple***

Confucian Temple is an educational space shaped by the interaction between people and environment.

The whole layout of the Confucian Temple implies a process of becoming a master: before entering the Hall, you should have the entrance ceremony (entering the Pan Pool), observe the Heavenly Way (passing through the Lingxing Gate), be noble in character, take the local successful people as examples (local sages and famous officials temples), learn knowledge and be sensible (Minglun Hall), and acquire knowledge (Zhunjing Pavilion) under the guidance of your teachers (Dacheng Hall, East and West Room). You should respect your teachers when you get fame, Don't forget your parents' upbringing (Qisheng Temple).

Through this interactive process, people will have a sense of identity and be naturally “educated”.

John Fiske believes that ritual is “organized symbolic practices and ceremonial activities which serve to define and represent the social and cultural significance of particular occasions, events or changes.” (Fiske, 2004)

As a traditional place for Confucius worship, Confucian temple is a ritual architecture that worships Confucianism, and it spreads all over the country. The Confucian Temple sacrifice is included in the national ceremony. Every year, the national memorial ceremony is held on the first Ding day of February and August in Chinese Lunar Calendar. The supreme ruler himself or his officials designated personally arrived at the Confucian Temple to pay homage to Confucius and the outstanding Confucian scholars who have made contributions to Confucianism through the ages and vigorously praised those who have made outstanding contributions to the theory of governing the country. The memorial ceremony is also very spectacular. In order to better integrate into the local customs and increase the sense of closeness and worship; Ningyuan Confucian Temple, in addition to the worship of Confucius, Four Sages and Twelve Philosophers in the Dacheng Hall, also worships local sages and famous officials in the east and west wing rooms. Since these sages are living around local people, and even have exchanges with them, the local people are clear about their outstanding

deeds, which naturally lead to respect and regard them as their life goals.

### *Aesthetic Production of Ningyuan Confucian Temple*

In this field visit, the most impressive architectural decoration of Ningyuan Confucian Temple is the dragon and phoenix columns. These 20 dragon and phoenix columns have the same style, but different shapes and are very vivid. The dragon columns of Ningyuan Confucian Temple are very peculiar in terms of decoration and carving techniques. Generally, the dragon body and clouds are carved first, and then the stone column itself. Compared with the dragon columns of Qufu Confucian Temple, they are more slender and elegant (Figure 6).



**Fig. 6** Dragon Columns and Door Leaves of Dacheng Hall (Source: the author's photography)

The curled-up dragons carved in Ningyuan Confucian Temple have the characteristics of retro style, as well as the local culture of Yongzhou. For example, the triangle scale armor has another function to distinguish the dragon from the snake. Armor, in Yongzhou people's mind, carries a moral of protection and indestructibility. (Gao, 2015)

The door leaves of Ningyuan Confucian Temple are not only carved with dragon patterns representing official buildings, but also carved with typical Hunan folk architectural decorative elements such as Baoxiang flower, lotus flower, plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum. As a materialization form of traditional cultural value, it also reflects the unique spiritual pursuit of Hunan local people for Ningyuan Confucian Temple, which makes the Confucian Temple better integrated into Hunan and more approachable.

## **Conclusion**

In the production of cultural space, culture must be produced and reproduced in the way of integration and sublimation of traditional and modern cultures, and must seek “the way of development and coexistence” in the integration of traditional and modern cultures. Cultural space and spiritual space constitute a field, integrating education, symbols, folk customs, aesthetics and other production methods.

Inspiration for contemporary public space: adapt to local cultural traditions, combine with local folk customs and aesthetic needs, integrate into local life, and realize local design. It can be done from the following aspects:

### *Inheriting Chinese Traditional Culture and Creating an Educational Space with Contemporary Characteristics*

In view of the actual requirements of contemporary society and the practical problems that need to be solved urgently, we should fully tap the beneficial elements of traditional Chinese culture, design a set of text and pictures suitable for speech and display in the Confucian Temple, so that traditional culture can be inherited here. In the era of rapid

development of science and technology and the Internet, we should be good at making use of technology and artistic means to create some appropriate space without destroying the Confucian Temple, which is a treasure of art. The advanced deeds of the leaders in various industries should be promoted here, and create the correct values and national outlook.

### ***Integrating into Ritual Activities with Contemporary Regional Characteristics***

Local Confucian temples can refer to the ancient ritual system, and formulate the ritual system and etiquette that conform to the life of contemporary people according to the requirements of the core values advocated by the state. They should not only integrate the contemporary and traditional cultural concepts, but also be grand and elegant. When the Confucius worship activities are held, the costumes, music and dance can add the local characteristics of Ningyuan County. It is necessary to let the people feel the charm of Chinese culture and at the same time experience the unique cultural characteristics of Ningyuan, so that people can realize the value of life, as well as the happiness of the people of Ningyuan. We should actively promote Ningyuan culture and let Ningyuan culture go further.

### ***Influence of Confucian Temple on Public Culture Communication***

Public activity space plays a very important role in both urban and rural construction. Through the sorting out of the production structure of Confucian Temple space in this paper, we can get some inspiration. When creating public activity space, we should make clear what the right structure, symbolic structure and folk custom structure of public activity space are, which can promote public space planning designers to do a better job of rural space design with local characteristics, Let the space realize "benign production", and the blood will flow continuously and be rejuvenated forever.

As an excellent cultural heritage, the Confucian Temple is not only of China, but also of the world. The formation of the space form of Confucian temples is greatly influenced by Confucius' thought. The whole building group reflects Confucius' ethical thought. It is precisely because of this progress and different levels that people can appreciate the majesty and solemnity of the Dacheng Hall of the Confucian Temple, which is filled with deep esteem. At the same time, the central axis layout and rich architectural elements of the Confucius Temple have had a profound impact on Chinese modern architectural design. Some excellent new buildings, inheriting the essence of traditional buildings, have unique characteristics and interpret new production space.

Through the research, it is found that the production structure of the Confucian Temple contains the power structure and production mode, which is the unique space production form of the Confucian Temple space. Among them, the right structure is mainly composed of political, economic and social relations. The mode of production mainly includes education, symbols, folk customs and aesthetic production. They are a unity of mutual contact and influence. Therefore, it can bring us a new perspective when analyzing other space problems.

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