

# Reproduction of Artistic Memory: Pictures and Symbols in the Culture of the House Corner of Chaoshan

Zhejun Zhang

School of Northeast Normal University, Changchun, China

## Abstract

The term "memory" has been invoked in many fields, and it has a unique form of expression and theoretical system. Memory is the reflection and accumulation of individual past experiences in the mind and the collective cognition formed and maintained through social interaction and cultural inheritance. With the concept of "collective memory" proposed by Habwachs, the concepts of cultural memory, communicative memory, and the field of memory have also become essential branches of the memory theory system. In this paper, we will take the architecture of the Chaoshan Alcove as the core research object and use the relevant knowledge of memory theory as the framework of the article. By examining and exploring the visual symbols, structural forms and decorative details of the Chaoshan Alcove, and narrative and reproduction, we will illustrate how the Chaoshan architectural art and cultural memories can be preserved and reproduced through the visual narratives on the historical, social and personal levels.

## Keywords

Artistic memory; cultural memory; Chaoshan architecture; image reproduction.

## 1. Introduction

Memory is at the heart of human experience, and it not only shapes individual identity but is also the basis of social and cultural identity. The concept of collective memory was first formally proposed by Maurice Halbwachs in the early 20th century, this concept belongs to the category of social memory, along with cultural memory and customary memory. It has gradually become an essential way for people to seek their identity, cultural recognition and group consciousness in social life. At the same time, it has also become the reflection of a collective's experience and emotion. For most ethnic groups, collective memory means a sense of collective destiny, mission, cultural history and cultural identity based on common words, actions and images, which not only exists in the individual's sense of belonging to the collective society but also exists in specific cultural scenes, objects and other aspects. There is a rich and diverse cultural heritage in the development of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, which not only embodies the creativity and aesthetic spirit of the Chinese nation but also marks the national consciousness and cultural identity and is an essential carrier of cultural memory. This paper takes the Chaoshan Alcove as an example and studies and explores the unique structural forms, decorative details, spatial layout and historical changes of the Chaoshan Alcove under the framework of art history, and then analyses how the unique cultural memory of the Chaoshan Alcove can be reconstructed and disseminated through the art of the Chaoshan Alcove, as well as the close connection between the Chaoshan architecture and the social dynamics and values of the region where it is situated, and elaborates on how the unique memory can be strengthened, inherited and passed on through the practice of daily life and social identity. It also illustrates how its unique memory is reinforced, inherited and recreated in daily life practices and social identity, inspiring future research and innovation in other regions and cultural genres.

## 2. Narratives of Memory

### 2.1. Conceptual Interpretation and Construction Path of Memory

The term "memory" in the field of psychology refers to the reflection of past experiences in the mind, the process by which the human brain recognizes, retains and reproduces experiences. In layperson's terms, memory is the individual's recollection and recall of cognitive processes, the process of maintaining and extracting them. Memory includes image memory, which is based on images of things; logical memory, which is based on universal knowledge and laws; emotional memory, which is based on emotional feelings; motor memory, which is based on actions or behaviors that have been done; and situational memory, which is based on an experience in the past. Memory is divided into three parts: recognition, retention, recollection and recall (reproduction) and the memory process is the process of storing, extracting and reproducing existing information. Thus, collective memory is the recollection and reproduction of shared past experiences by a particular group or ethnic group. At the beginning of the 20th century, Maurice Halbwachs, a student of the famous French sociologist Emile Durkheim, first explicitly put forward the concept of collective memory, which he considered to be the process and result of the sharing of past events by the members of a specific social group, and the collective memory of a group of people. It is the collective memory of a group of people. On this basis, German scholars Johann Christoph Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann jointly developed the theory of "cultural memory"[1] to explore the conditions conducive to the formation of human cultural and social identity and collective consciousness. and collective consciousness. In his research on memory theory, Jan Assmann recognized that culture not only has the co-temporal function of organizing and coordinating groups but also has the ephemeral function of long-term preservation and trans-temporal dissemination through different media, which enables cultural memory to have a kind of "ephemeral identity," thus forming identity across time and space, which is the core of collective memory. Identity is the core of collective memory. According to Jan Assmann, Hahn's collective memory belongs to "communicative memory," and some communicative memories can be transformed into cultural memories through the functions of preservation and transmission of media, while others are left in the past and become forgotten history.

Based on the meaning of collective memory and cultural memory theory mentioned above, this paper focuses on the excellent traditional Chinese cultural architecture with Alcove Head as the memory carrier in Chaoshan under the perspectives of art history and sociology. It promotes the inheritance and continuation of cultural memory and symbolic significance of the architectural art represented by the Alcove Head in Chaoshan through the process of narrating and recreating the "picture and imagination" in the artistic memory. Through the process of narrating and reproducing "picture and imagination" in artistic memory, the cultural memory and symbolism of the architectural art represented by the Alcove Head in Chaoshan will be inherited and continued, thus promoting the inter-temporal and inter-disciplinary study of Chaoshan architectural culture, and realizing the more profound narration of memory carriers in the fields of art, humanity and history.

### 2.2. Multiple Perspectives on Artistic Memory

Artistic memory is an integral part of cultural memory, which preserves and reproduces human artistic wisdom, creation and aesthetic experience through various forms and media.

#### 2.2.1. Memory Theory and Art Inheritance and Innovation

According to the theory of Halbwachs[2], collective memory is the memory of the past shared by a social group, which is constructed through social interaction and cultural activities. Works of art are often the carriers and media of collective memory, and they reflect the shared experiences and emotions of a group. Assmann's theory of cultural memory emphasizes the

role of artistic traditions and symbolic systems in the construction of memory. Art forms that use memory as a carrier not only preserve technical and aesthetic values but also convey their unique cultural meanings and belief systems.

### **2.2.2. Works of Art and Rituals as Mediums of Memory**

Works of art, as mediums of cultural memory, can solidify individual or collective experiences and emotions in material form. As a kind of physical existence, primarily works with a long history, artworks can retain and extract the past and emotions that have been gradually forgotten with time in the form of a memory repository.

### **2.2.3. The Interaction between Art Experience and Personal Memory**

Art is presented in reality in many forms, triggering personal memories through oral narratives, written records, archives and cinematographic filming, exhibitions in exhibition halls, media exposure and dissemination, etc., and becoming a symbolic expression of an individual's past experiences and emotions. Individuals are connected to their memories through the phenomenon of art, thus forming a unique personal memory.

### **2.2.4. Reconstruction, Retention and Reproduction of Artistic Memory**

Artistic creation or artistic phenomenon itself is a reconstruction and reinterpretation of a specific memory. Taking the identity of the artist as an example, through the reflection and imagination of past experiences in the cognitive process, artists create new works and phenomena, which are both reconstructions of memory. It is also an extraction and reproduction of history under specific conditions.

## **2.3. Overview of Alcove Head and its Cultural Symbolism**

Chaoshan, located in the coastal area of southeastern Guangdong Province, has been an essential node of the Maritime Silk Road since ancient times. The architecture of the Chaoshan area, also known as Chaoshan or Chaozhou houses, belongs to the Minnan sub-folk system of the Minhai folk system. Influenced by the culture of the Central Plains, the maritime culture and the overseas culture, the architecture of Chaoshan has formed an architectural style that combines the characteristics of multiple cultures, showing the unique charm of the Chinese nation's multi-cultural unity.

Alcove is an essential architectural feature in Chaoshan. In the Teochew dialect, "Chu" means "house", which initially refers to the temporary residence of the ancestors who moved to Chaoshan, and then "Chu" was used as the sign and symbol of the regional cultural identity of the township. Alcove corner, generally refers to the four corners of the roof, also known as corner decoration. The appearance of the corners is dominated by the upward curved corner structure, including straight lines, curved lines, foot shapes, etc. The corners are often carved with symbolic patterns of flowers, birds, beasts and figures and decorated with brightly colored paintings, which not only embody the practical function of protecting the building from moisture and erosion but also enhance the visual aesthetic effect of the Chaoshan architecture. The design and construction of the Alcove Corner Head is influenced by the Five Elements doctrine[3], which includes the Golden Style, Wooden Style, Water Style, Fire Style, and Earth Style Mountain Walls, and the choice of materials will be based on the orientation of the building, the owner's date of birth and eight characters of a horoscope and other factors to choose materials corresponding to the building, which to achieve the balance of the Five Elements. Different styles have different shapes and meanings. In terms of decorative motifs and architectural structure, the ornamental motifs of the Alcove Corner Head include dragon, phoenix, tiger, crane and tortoise, which correspond to the five elements of gold, wood, water, fire and earth, respectively. These patterns are not only used for decoration but also to harmonize the five elements and enhance the auspicious and harmonious meaning of the building. For example, if the "fire" element in a specific direction is too strong, it will be balanced

by increasing the "water" element; in terms of form design and color application, if a particular direction of the building needs to strengthen the "wood" element, the architect will use the "water" element to balance it out. In terms of form design and color application, if a particular area of the building needs to strengthen the "wood" element, the architects will design a slender, upward-growing shape according to the characteristics of the house's mountain walls to symbolize the attribute of wood. At the same time, the five elements also correspond to the five colors of white, green, black, red and yellow, and their painted decorations will also be colored according to the principle of the five elements in order to achieve the balance of the five elements and the purpose of auspiciousness and harmony.

### **3. Pictures and Symbols**

#### **3.1. Picturesque: Images in Alcove Heads**

The house corner of Chaoshan not only unites the charm of the unique local society and culture but also embodies the totemic life philosophy and excellent understanding of the Chaoshan people. The art of the alcove head is a manifestation of the aesthetics, images and symbolism of traditional Chinese culture, which combines the traditional Chinese philosophy and aesthetics represented by yin and yang and the five elements into the modeling and decorative art of Chaoshan architecture, such as alcove head, by means of the figurative expression of symbols and figures in the sense of scene, modeling and decoration, which fully proves the values, nature and philosophical concepts of Chaoshan region. As mentioned above, the design and construction of the house corner of Chaoshan were heavily influenced by the Five Elements doctrine. The five elements doctrine is an essential concept in ancient Chinese philosophical thinking, representing the five essential elements of mountain walls with local characteristics. The five forms of mountain walls, namely round, steep, long, sharp and flat, correspond to the five elements of the Five Elements.

##### **3.1.1. Smooth arc-gold**

The most common folk wall in Chaoshan is the gold-style mountain wall. On the one hand, the Chaoshan region has been a critical economic and cultural exchange from ancient times, economic prosperity and development, merchants gathered, the prayers for wealth and worship of the intense psychological, reflected in the architectural art is the gold elements of the central alcove; on the other hand, the gold and stone. On the other hand, Jinshi Mountain Wall is round and broad, also known as a pot-ear shape, with beautiful and smooth lines and significant undulation. It is built and transformed according to the shape of ancient pipe hats, which implies a great future and a vast source of wealth.

##### **3.1.2. Square corners-wood**

"Wood shape is round and straight" is a folk overview of the characteristics of wood-style mountain walls. Generally speaking, geomancy masters make projections based on the date of birth and eight characters of a horoscope. Suppose the homeowner's five elements lack wood and need to strengthen the "wood" element. In that case, the architect will, based on the characteristics of the house's mountain wall, design into a more slender, upward-growing shape to symbolize the attributes of wood.

##### **3.1.3. Three waves - water**

The water-style mountain wall is wave-shaped, undulating shape, designed to follow the natural symmetry and the laws of motion; the undulation is mostly three levels; the water-style mountain wall is also a deformation and transformation of the pot ear wall. The characteristics of the wave type are also known as "smooth wind and water"; compared to the pot ear wall is more like the ancient official hat, so it is not shared. "Compared with the pot ear wall, the water-type mountain wall is more like the ancient official hat, so it is not shared.

### 3.1.4. Sharp Tail Ridge - Fire

The fire-style mountain wall is in the form of a sharp peak or a triangle, which has the meaning of exuberance and fullness of descendants and is mainly seen in ancestral temples and other places of worship.

### 3.1.5. Convex zigzag - soil

Mainly in the Alcove head of the outer contour line convex and concave changes in the line fluctuations and undulations, the image of the prominent three-dimensional, the overall look was "belly" form, "belly" is also divided into "flower and bird belly," "figure belly" and "landscape belly," with the ancient Chinese painting in landscape painting, flower and bird painting and landscape painting, and the ancient Chinese painting. "is also divided into" birds and flowers belly, "people belly "and" landscape belly, "an ancient Chinese painting in landscape painting, birds and flowers painting and figure painting classification have the same thing.

## 3.2. Symbols: cultural memory and the identity construction of the picture

As a memory carrier of Chaoshan culture, the Chaoshan residential houses construct a strong sense of regional identity in the minds of Chaoshan residents. According to Habwach's views on technology, memory, imagination and social thought in his book *On Collective Memory*, memory is a social reconstruction of the past that operates in a collective framework and, at the same time, an extraction of the past in a current perspective. The re-enactment of the past relies on the collective ritual construction of the present, and the binding effect of experience on the present remains only in the past unless it is inherited and developed in some form in the process of reconstruction and transmission. In the past, people designed and shaped the alcove head through the combination of the five elements doctrine with carvings and colorful paintings. In the process of creation, they incorporated various historical figures and folk legends, which became a bridge linking the past and the present.

In addition to the integration of the five elements in the construction of the mountain wall, the Alcove Jiao Tou of the Chaoshan residential houses also has distinctive characteristics of the times. The process of designing and constructing, redesigning and reconstructing the alcoves in different temporal and spatial perspectives has its own unique historical and cultural lineage, thus reflecting the concept of "social quality" repeatedly mentioned by Ha in his interpretation of "collective memory" that is, emphasizing a changing and flowing social perspective. It reflects the concept of "social quality" that Hahn repeatedly refers to in his interpretation of "collective memory," which emphasizes a shifting and fluid view of society. Individual memory must be dependent on society or the collective for its existence, and this dependence can come from individual oral accounts, collective writing, archival research, or any other substance that carries memory. The pure individual can maintain a consistent memory. Still, in the absence of social arousal, it is difficult to retain and extract it in the future, and only a "collective ritual reconstruction" can enable the re-enactment of past experiences.

Chaoshan dwellings were constructed roughly during the Qin Dynasty. Under the dual influence of the political aims of the first emperor of Qin and the culture of the Chinese Middle Kingdom, a unique architectural culture gradually emerged in the Chaoshan region. [4] From the Qin-Han to the Sui-Tang dynasties, building materials in the Chaoshan area were mainly made of stones, bricks, tiles, and other raw materials with more distinctive textures. During this period, the mountain walls of Chaoshan dwellings were initially developed, and they also provided preliminary preparations for the formation and development of the later Alcove Corner Heads. During the period of Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, the roofs of residences in Chaoshan were mainly characterized by "fish scales and bird wings." The tiles of the houses were arranged on the roofs in an orderly manner, like the scales of a fish, and the roofs were equipped with two corners on both sides, which looked like the wings of a bird on the whole. Alcove angle

head and "fish scale and bird wing" style of roof complement each other and work together to create the aesthetic characteristics of Chaoshan houses. For example, Xu extra horse harnessed by the side of a team in the Song and Ming Dynasties adopted the "gold" style of mountain wall, and the Zhao Ancestral Ancestral Shrine adopted the combination of the "gold" and "fire" style of mountain wall; the De'anli and Kang Clan Ancestral Shrines adopted the "gold and fire" style of mountain wall in the Qing Dynasty. During the Qing Dynasty, De'anli and Kang's Ancestral Hall adopted the four elements of "gold, wood, water and fire" as their architectural features. It can be seen that people in this period redesigned and rebuilt their houses on the basis of their predecessors' modifications, insisted on inheriting the past construction experience, and remodeled the present memory carriers to realize the continuation and reproduction of cultural memories and connotations. It not only promotes the expansion and development of the mountain walls of Chaoshan houses but also shows the aesthetic interest and aesthetic spirit of the ancients who took the source of mountains and waters.

The architectural characteristics of Chaoshan Alcove Corner Heads are not only reflected in their modeling art but also their diverse decorative techniques and cultural symbols. For example, in the integration of the five elements mentioned above and the Alcove Corner Head, the five elements correspond to the five colors - gold, wood, water, fire and earth corresponding to the five colors of white, green, black, red and yellow, respectively. For example, green is the most common color in nature; flowers, plants and trees are set off by "green" and are used to decorate buildings with the aesthetic principle of "unity of man and nature," nature keeps operating and renewing. Human beings should also carry out activities and creations on the basis of following the objective laws of nature so as to realize harmony between social groups and human beings. Activity and creation, to achieve the dynamic identity and balance between social groups and natural things in heaven and earth, in order to achieve the purpose of harmonious coexistence of man and nature; black in the doctrine of the five elements and the water corresponds to the Chaozhou-Shantou region as one of the rainy climates in the south of one of the regions, the rainy season is long. The residents like water, and water and other natural objects coexist; the water in the buildings around the formation of algae and aquatic plants such as a class close to the black of the dark color! Aquatic plants such as marine algae and water plants are formed around the buildings, which have the same meaning as "green," emphasizing the close connection between human beings in the realm of thought and all natural things in mutual respect and symbiosis.[5]

Alcove Corner Heads in Chaoshan are often decorated with a variety of symbolic and natural patterns, which, together with the outlines of the walls characterized by the Five Elements, are rich in symbolism and cultural meanings. For example, the ancestral halls and temples with the architectural characteristics of Alcove Corner Head will select the decorative themes of myths and folklore that signify good luck, wealth and well-being through the art forms of inlaid ceramics, color painting and carvings, such as dragons, phoenixes, bats and fishes, etc. The dragons and phoenixes symbolize power, dignity, beauty and peace, and at the same time, they stand for the harmony of yin and yang and the harmony of the family; the bats and the fishes adopt the harmonic symbols of bats and fishes, i.e., "blessing." The bat and the fish both adopt harmonic symbolism; the bat is "Fu," full of good fortune; the fish is "Yu," year after year, good harvest every year. Fruits and plants are primarily used in lotus, citrus, lychee, peaches, plums, etc. Lotus symbolizes the purity and nobility of "out of the silt and not stained," and fruit-based food reflects the proverb that "people eat as the day," which shows that there are various types of patterns on the head of the alcove and the symbols include But not limited to political and rights purposes, it also reflects the general public's expectations for a better life.[4]

The decorative arts on many mountain walls contain rich ideological connotations and philosophical and aesthetic pursuits, presenting ancient Confucian and Taoist thoughts to the public through visual images. These images and landscapes, as carriers of memory and places

of memory, can reflect historical changes and the construction of social and collective memory. Habwach writes in *On Collective Memory, The Positioning of Memory*, "As long as we place ourselves in a particular group, accept the group's will, and prioritize its interests, we will merge our memories into the group's memory." Alcove head decorative art centered on a variety of subjects such as flora and fauna, myths and legends, and biographies of historical figures have become a symbolic form of a particular cultural memory in the process of extracting and reproducing memories and shared cultural memories and symbolic meanings can unite communities with this type of memory together, strengthening the sense of collective belonging and the identity of the collective memory. "Taking the whole content of the inheritance of literary classics, decorative arts and other symbolic forms as the object of study, we have meticulously examined the functions of cultural memory and the forms and changes of the media and built a rich and profound theoretical framework for memory with considerable explanatory power." From this, it can be seen that the Chaoshan alcove corner head not only belongs to the components of traditional architectural forms but also is an essential symbol of cultural memory and identity construction.

#### **4. The Modern Transformation and Conservation of Alcove Heads in Chaoshan**

Jan Assmann defines collective memory in Hausmann's theory as a kind of "communicative memory," which is how individual memories are realized in collective communication. Cultural memory, with the cultural system as the main body of memory, transcends the purely personal and can only be sustained in the present by returning to the collective society, preserving and reproducing it in the form of oral and written records, theater performances, media dissemination, museum exhibitions, and archival research of heritage. *The Art of Alcove Head in the Modernization Process*

##### **4.1. The Art of Alcove Head in the Modernization Process**

With a long history and rich heritage, the art of alcove corner head, as a part of traditional Chinese architecture, is crucial to ensure its integrity and historicity. By exploring the new functions of the cultural elements of the alcove in modern life, combining the traditional alcove design with modern architectural techniques, strengthening the promotion and innovation of the alcove culture, and realizing the adaptive reuse and cultural innovation of the alcove art, we can promote the reproduction and dissemination of the artistic memory.

Porcelain inlay, as an essential part of the art of alchemy, is full of artistic features with its exquisite craftsmanship and meticulous decoration. Through the process of cutting, composing, and collaging the tiny pieces of porcelain, the artisans have shaped richly shaped shapes on the mountain walls, which are beautiful to behold. But inlaid porcelain is most of the time exposed to the outdoors, long hours of wind and sunshine and the high demand for technology, so they can insist on continuing to engage in the art of inlaid porcelain, and the inheritance of the workers are facing significant challenges. Currently involved in porcelain inlay workers to overcome the shortcomings of the porcelain inlay work environment, the outdoor work to indoor work, with the help of modern mass media, the handmade porcelain inlay made of beautiful objects sold to the country and even around the world.

On the one hand, the culture of Alcove has been passed on and promoted through the physical, material and commercialized art of porcelain mosaic. It has been [6], thus acquiring a new and innovative meaning given by the times, giving it a new lease of life in a new media environment. It has been revitalized in the new media environment. On the other hand, Alcove culture belongs to the collective memory and shared memories of Chaoshan residents for generations,

and the reproduction of its connotation through the modern media enables the continuation and development of this cultural memory in the process of collective construction.

#### 4.2. Conservation Strategies and Practices for Alcove Heads

The alcove is a vital memory carrier embodying the traditional folk culture of Chaoshan; in the process of protecting and developing the alcove should try to preserve the original appearance of the building itself, constantly study and improve the protection technology and method of Alcove, improve the professionalism and effectiveness of the protection work of the architectural features of alcove category, carry out the necessary restoration works through fieldwork and site exploration, strengthen the renovation of the old wall and the decorative The restoration of the maximum integrity of the art, and on this basis, scientific and technological innovation.

### 5. Cultural Inheritance and Identity of Chaoshan Architectural Art

The art of Chaoshan architecture, represented by the Chuukotou, is not only the collective memory of the Chaoshan residents but also the social memory of the artisans who designed and built it and of the groups who indirectly experienced the culture of Chaoshan. The process of cultural inheritance of Chaoshan architectural art is the process of "making history" (7). [7] "Making history" is not a random writing on a blank sheet of paper but a "re-making" of the social-historical memory of the past by "all the members of the group of the big self" based on an objective social framework. "The people as the creators of history. As the creators of history, the masses, to a certain extent, also reflect historical changes and the construction of social memory.

### 6. Conclusion

As a memory carrier of Chaoshan traditional residential culture, Alcove plays a vital role in artistic memory and identity construction. Its decorative patterns and architectural forms construct a standard cultural memory and regional identity among the groups sharing collective memory under the same domain, so the art of Alcove, which has a long history and is rich in meaning, has prospered up to now. In today's rapid development of science and technology, facing the challenges of modernization, how to realize the further inheritance and re-creation of traditional Chinese art and culture exemplified by Alcove is still an essential branch of the issue of the times. With the passage of time and the migration of society, the collective memory symbolized by the alcove head is constantly being constructed, forgotten, reconstructed and reproduced. The innovative and creative reproduction promotes the evolution of artistic memory from the past reality to the future.

### References

- [1] Aleida Asman. Spaces of recollection: forms and transformations of cultural memory [M]. Translated by Pan Lu. Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2016-3.
- [2] Maurice Halbwachs. On Collective Memory [M]. Translated by Bi Ran and Guo Jinhua. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2002-10.
- [3] LIN Shaofeng. Research on the modeling of hill walls and alcove corner heads of traditional folk houses in Chaoshan [D]. South China University of Technology, 2016.
- [4] Du Jieli. Symbolism of the Decorative Art of Five Elements Mountain Wall in Chaoshan[J]. Decoration, 2017, (01):107-109.
- [5] Lai Huiping, Chen Han. Artistic Representation and Inheritance of Architectural Decoration of Overseas Chinese Houses in Chaoshan[J]. Beauty and Age(City Edition), 2024, (05):16-18.
- [6] Ni Ziqing, Gu Hongnan. Research on the Protection and Renewal Strategy of Traditional Street Space

e under the Perspective of Cultural Memory--Taking Chongqing Cuntan Old Street as an Example [J]. Central China Architecture,2024,42(04):101-106.

- [7] Yin Jianqiang, Lin Tao. Memory Mapping and Schematic Reproduction of Lingnan Architectural Decorative Inlaid Porcelain Art[J]. Journal of Nanjing Art Institute (Art and Design),2023,(04):85-89.