

The Aesthetical Features and Cultural Significance of Yunnan Folk Eaves Tile

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Abstract: *There are many ethnic minorities in Yunnan, cultural and ecological preservation is relatively complete and full of cultural diversity. Yunnan folk eaves tile has become one of the carriers of many cultures. It contains the thought and feelings of local working people along with the sophisticated social environment with high artistic value. This essay penetrates from the pattern of folk eaves tile and studies the style, structure and artistic features of folk eaves tile in Yunnan, summing up the aesthetical formula and structure of Yunnan folk eaves tile.*

Keywords: *Patterns, Yunnan folk eaves tile, Aesthetical features*

Eaves tile is the shelter of the edge of pantile in ancient Chinese architecture, it condenses and reflects the ideological, political and ethnical beliefs of a particular historical stage. It is a carrier of ethnical culture and of high value for investigation and research. It helps us to understand the living customs, folk life of various nationalities, therefore, it can be said that eaves tile is defined both a traditional building component and an externalized symbol of traditional culture and folk beliefs. Eaves tile not only preserves historical materials of calligraphy, painting and carving for future generations, but also martial arts, social culture, and even national character and psychology."

1. Overview of Yunnan Eaves Tiles

1.1. History of Yunnan Eaves Tiles

Eaves tiles appeared relatively late in Yunnan, and Yunnan people have a straightforward name for it, "Goutou". The earliest surviving eaves tiles in Yunnan was unearthed in the Dali area during the Tang and Song Dynasties. Most of the other preserved are relics since the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Although its historical significance and artistic value cannot be compared with those of the Qin and Han Dynasties, it is still valuable study materials for reference of various historical periods in Yunnan in politics, culture, economy, and art. The patterns of the Yunnan Eaves tiles are integrated into a large number of national folk cultures, such as religious symbols, national totems, etc. The implicit meaning is very far-reaching, and it is a very rare native material for studying the native culture of Yunnan. Yunnan's local eaves tiles has experienced thousands of years of wind and rain and vicissitudes. The profound historical dust contains the strong social and cultural atmosphere of various periods and nationalities. Their existence have recorded the changes of the times and continues the unique artistic style with long-term and profound eaves tile culture.

1.2. Types and Characters of Yunnan Folk Eaves Tiles

During the Nanzhao period, Yunnan began to build and expand Taihe City, Longwei City, Longkou City, Dengchuan City, Baiya City, Xiyuan City, Tuodong City, etc., and eaves tile began to appear. At that time, it was divided into two types of house tiles: one called "slate tiles" was large in volume and small in curvature. It covered the roof and was placed in order, usually placed upside down between two columns. The other type is called "cylinder tile", which has a larger arc but a smaller volume in a narrower diameter. When laying the tiles, pour the mortar into its concave surface, and overlap and buckle the gap between the two tiles in the longitudinal connection, these tiles are arranged in a row in order, in rainy days, the rainwater flows into neat orderly ditches and slowly shed down.

In terms of materials, materials of Yunnan eaves tiles are mainly divided into three types: gray

pottery, glazed glass, and metal (Figure 1-3). Different grades of buildings use different materials. Gray pottery is the oldest and most widely used, the "glazed tile" is called "glazed tile" by the people, and the colors are mainly blue, green, blue, yellow, etc., most of them are used in high-class buildings. "In the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, metal tiles were used in a few buildings. There are three varieties of cast iron, brass and gold plaster."



Figure 1: Grey pottery tile



Figure 2: Glazed tile



Figure 3: Metal tile

In terms of shape, Yunnan eaves tile is roughly divided into three types, including semi-circular eaves tile, round eaves tile, square eaves tile and fan-shaped eaves tile. Eaves tile was initially semi-circular, and the accumulation of experience over time gradually developed into the most common circular tiled nowadays (as shown in Figure 4-5). From the perspective of culture and art, the circular tile is of higher cultural and artistic value. The appearance of the circular tile provides a larger space for the creation of patterns. Craftsmen fully exerted their imagination in the small circular space and created a variety of novel and brilliant art worlds on clay tile. The tile patterns are not bad, and the delicate, rich patterns, vivid images, complete pictures, and balanced layout can be regarded as folk treasures. Their existence greatly enriches the folk art in Yunnan.



Figure 4: Semicircular tile



Figure 5: Square tile

According to the decoration, Yunnan folk tiles have geometric patterns, animals, flowers, and characters (as shown in Figure 6-8). The patterns vary from simple to complex, realistic to abstract, which is a fusion of art, decoration and architecture. "The pattern of the image of tiles is mainly characterized by natural objects, and the style is more realistic. The theme is often people, birds, fish, frogs, trees, flowers, etc., reflecting the longing for life, love and praise for life. The pattern abstractly deforms natural objects, regularly processing the changing variety of graphics." has decorative properties, of which cloud pattern eaves tiles are representative. During the Han Dynasty, the popular text pattern tiles were partially composed of the Qin Dynasty and the Han Dynasty. Due to the limitations of space, The characters use the artistic characteristics of the structure of Chinese characters to create a unique layout. Some people also use clever combination of words and patterns. These tiles are dense and interesting.



Figure 6: Flower pattern tile



Figure 7: Animal face tile



Figure 8: Ruyi (Wish) tile

2. Analysis of the Pattern Types of Folk Tiles in Yunnan

The tiles appearing in Yunnan are presenting a strong sense of regional culture. According to the patterns, they can be roughly classified into three categories, namely image tiles, pattern tiles and text tiles.

2.1. Plant Pattern Tiles

The tiles that appear in Yunnan are mainly plant patterns, especially flower patterns. Commonly seen are chrysanthemum, lotus, rose, plum, peony, camellia, hibiscus, peach, canna, etc., the style of Yunnan eaves tile is more realistic and full of vitality than those of the central plains, and many ornaments have their profound meanings.



Figure 9: Tea pattern tile



Figure 10: Lotus pattern tile

Camellia like eaves tile—Camellia is rich in flower style, noble and elegant. It is the provincial flower of Yunnan Province and a symbol of vitality. Camellia tile is divided into internal and external structure, centered with camellia, various in composition, surrounded by curly grass pattern, smooth and simple lines, with abundant decorative meaning (Figure 9). Tea pattern tile—Yunnan tea has a long history. Tea pattern tile was first discovered in Yiwu Old Street, Mengla County, Xishuangbanna Prefecture, Yunnan. Another example is the hibiscus flower tile (Figure 10), because it blooms after frost, and is also known as frost-resistant flower, manglietia, and hibiscus. Because the Chinese characters "rong" and "rong" are homophonic, it is used as a symbol of prosperity and glory.

The lotus pattern tile is the most frequently patterned tile in various periods and places (Figure 11-12). In the Tang Dynasty, the lotus pattern had a single petal shape, a large diameter, and a rich picture. Most of the patterns were drawn freehand. Unlike the Tang Dynasty, during the Five Dynasties and the early Dali Dynasty in Yunnan, the pattern of lotus tiles became longer, similar to the chrysanthemum pattern. Later patterns were mainly realistic, with diverse patterns, but smaller and thinner in diameter.



Figure 11: Yunnan Dali lotus pattern tile



Figure 12: The Tang Dynasty lotus pattern tile

2.2. Animal Pattern Tile

The largest proportion of Yunnan eaves tile is animal-patterned tiles. The picture is symmetrical and full of decoration. It can truly make people feel the aesthetics of the ancients, and also reflects the attitude and wisdom of admiring and respecting nature (Figure 13-14). Twenty-five ethnic minorities live in Yunnan, and each ethnic group has its own God totem, so eaves tile was marked with a deep ethnical brand. The butterfly pattern tile found in Tonghai County has very local characteristics. In various ethnic groups in Yunnan, colorful butterflies and flowers can often be seen together to form a "butterfly flower" pattern. There are Butterfly Springs in Yunnan, thus there are many stories about butterflies. It can be seen that people of all ethnic groups in Yunnan are very fond of butterfly patterns. It often appears on all kinds of ornaments. At the same time, there are many butterflies, and the butterfly pattern also means the endless heirs.

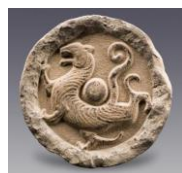


Figure 13: Animal pattern tile



Figure 14: Swallow pattern tile

Swallows are a symbol of spring, and because swallows are known to be male and female, flying is a symbol of love. Jianshui has a very famous "Swallow Cave", and it seems that the appearance of swallow grain tiles here is also expected.

Horse pattern tile during the Nanzhao period, the Dian horse was called "Yue Yan Horse". It was once a tribute to the Tang Dynasty, such as the horse pattern tile found in Tengchong County (Figure 15). In addition, the Central Plains culture is widely absorbed in Yunnan, and the dragon totem is the one with the most animal prints. The Dali State Dragon-pattern tile, currently in the collection of the Dali State Museum, was found in Jianchuan, Yunnan. It is a cylindrical tile, with internal and external structures, centered on the image of a dragon face. The important role of dragons in traditional culture often appears on eaves tile in various regions in various periods (Figure 16).



Figure 15: Horse Pattern Tile



Figure 16: Dragon pattern tile

2.3. Text Pattern Tile

The text pattern tile is an important type of eaves tile in Yunnan, and it is one of the carriers that can best reflection the culture of Yunnan minority nationalities. Yunnan eaves tile decoration pursues 'Picture must be intentional, meaning must be auspicious'. For example, the word "water" in the pattern of eaves tile first appeared in the Dali area, reflecting the living conditions of local residents relying on water for drinking, as well as the mental state of extinguishing water and praying for peace.

3. Artistic Characteristics of Yunnan Folk Eaves Tile Patterns

Yunnan folk tile art is an important and scarce art. It has rich content and reflects the environmental background closely related to people's lives.

3.1. Model

Various from central plain China mainly in shape of circle, the eaves tiles in Yunan of rich diversity, such as round, half round, triangle, wish-shaped (shown as Figure17-18). These shapes are not only caused by the unique geographical environment and natural climate of Yunnan, but also deeply influenced by the unique architectural style of Yunnan residential houses. The details of tiled buildings will make people have rich associations with local culture. Every architecture detail will remind people of the past history on these buildings, eaves tiles provide important historical information to scholars who study history. It records the rise and fall of a city along with the temperament and spirit of a nation.



Figure 17: Wish Eaves tile



Figure 18: Triangle Eaves tile

3.2. Structure

"Composition of eaves tiles skillfully resolve the contradiction between restriction and freedom, so that it is full of vitality in the law and maintains a relative balance between the opposition." Eaves tile patterns are extremely rich. They are derived from folk life. Through the bricklayer's own aesthetical awareness and imagination, from the beginning of drawing the model of the tile, they can integrate the things seen, heard and thought in life into manifestation. The division of Yunnan eaves tile is rich and diverse, including one-element structure, internal and external structure, and four-element structure. The most common image and pattern tiles are internal and external structures. The internal area is circular and the center is filled with suitable patterns. There are many forms, such as heart shape, radial shape, cross shape, balance shape, etc.

The internal and external structure in addition to the ordinary 7:3, there are also 8:2, 6:4, etc(as shown in Figure 19). According to the requirement of the text, the craftsman arranges ingeniously in the limited space that is boldly allocated, there is no gap in the picture, and the lines are strong. Graceful and graceful, this is the representative of Fang Zhengliu among the tiles.



Figure 19: (For example, in Figure 19, the tile composition is simple, with only a cross border, the four-character stroke of "Changle Weiyang" does not change with space. Although it is different in length, it is full of ancient meaning and witty and natural. It is the representative of the naive nature in the tile.)

3.3. Cultural Connotation

Yunnan Eaves tile is delicate and compact with a wide range of decorative materials, realistic patterns, full of concise and vivid. The composition of the tiled pattern is a combined symmetrical fan surface, that is, the full circle of the tile is divided into an inner circle and an outer circle with a string pattern, and then the outer circle is equally divided into four fan shapes, and the deer, black, and black are painted with the same shape and posture. Various animal patterns such as horses and leaf patterns, lotus petal patterns, sunflower patterns and deformed sunflower patterns and other plant patterns. The patterns of these animals and plants record the history of the transition of various ethnic groups to an agricultural economy and society, and embody the different demands and wishes of various social strata. After Buddhist art was widely spread to Yunnan, the lotus pattern became extremely popular. The lotus-patterned tile ornamentation changed from plain lotus to double-petal lotus, and the surroundings were mostly decorated with continuous bead patterns, which became the main decorative theme of the tile in Yunnan at that time. By Song Dynasty, the beast-faced tile gradually replaced the lotus-patterned tile as the dominant position, which lasted until Ming and Qing Dynasties.

It can be seen from the characteristics of the shapes and patterns of the tiles in different periods that Yunnan eaves tile bears the imprint of the times, contains rich historical and social information, and is a testimony to the historical development of various ethnic groups.

4. Conclusion

After thousands of years, the story recorded on the big circle on palm of time is a silent book. The tile on the eaves witnessed the turbulent historical changes in Yunnan. As an independent art style, it embodies the wisdom and ingenuity of the ancient people, and shows the changes in people's aesthetic consciousness. It has become a symbol of the ancient civilizations with timeless exquisites.

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