Journal of World Architecture, 2026, Volume 10, Issue 5
https://bbwpublisher.com/journal/JWA
Online ISSN: 2208-3499
Print ISSN 2208-3480

Research on the Dynamic Protection of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba from the Perspective of Its Traditional Functions

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Abstract: The Hakka ancestral halls in southern Jiangxi Province are an important traditional architectural form in this region and serve as a significant material carrier of Hakka culture in southern Jiangxi Province. These ancestral halls have diverse functions, including ancestor worship, education and norms, cultural entertainment, etc. Their functions have remained stable and have been continuously carried out. After the 1950s, society changed greatly, and most of the Hakka ancestral halls in southern Jiangxi Province had the problem of functional degradation. As a typical Hakka ancestral hall in southern Jiangxi Province, the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba, located in Quannan County, Ganzhou City, also experienced such a process of development and decline. In recent years, the value of Hakka ancestral halls has gradually been recognized, and society has increasingly emphasized the protection of Hakka ancestral halls to stimulate the vitality of traditional rural areas. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct scientific and reasonable dynamic protection and utilization of the Hakka ancestral halls, and fully utilize the value of the Hakka ancestral hall cultural heritage. Through literature research and field investigations, the architectural structure, historical evolution, and functional characteristics of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba were understood in detail. The main current problems of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba were identified as the degradation of traditional functions and a low utilization rate. Finally, based on the identified problems and in combination with the characteristics of the ancestral hall, innovative and sustainable ideas and strategies for the dynamic protection of traditional functions were proposed.

Keywords: The Hakka ancestral halls; The Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba; Living protection; Cultural heritage

Online publication: November 17, 2026

1. Introduction

In recent years, the protection of cultural heritage has received increasing attention. Society has actively promoted the protection and utilization of cultural relics and the inheritance and protection of cultural heritage, exploring the multiple values of cultural relics and cultural heritage [1]. The protection and utilization

of traditional village ancestral halls have gradually gained attention in the process of cultural heritage protection.

The Hakka ancestral halls in southern Jiangxi Province are an important part of the traditional Hakka villages in this region. They serve as significant physical carriers and cultural spaces of Hakka traditional culture. They not only embody the honor of the family and family ethics but also serve as the spiritual home of the Hakka villagers. With the development of society and the change in villagers' ideas, the functions and roles of the Hakka ancestral halls have gradually weakened, and new paths for protection and development need to be explored. Implementing dynamic protection of the Hakka ancestral halls can better preserve the Hakka traditional culture in southern Jiangxi Province and promote the sustainable development of the Hakka traditional villages.

2. Overview of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba

2.1. Historic evolution

The Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba is located in Dajishan Town, Quannan County, Ganzhou City, Jiangxi Province. It was built during the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty (1573–1620), approximately 400 years ago. It has undergone several renovations since then. During the Yongzheng period of the Qing Dynasty (1723–1735), it was rebuilt and expanded. By 1935, it was completed and basically retained its original architectural style. Later, in 1985 and 2006, the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba was renovated again [1].

2.2. Building overview

The Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba (**Figure 1**) covers a total area of 2,608.4 square meters and has a total floor area of 698.2 square meters. The main structure is 11.8 meters high, 14.52 meters wide, and 44.4 meters long, facing south with its back to the north. Its shape and structure are among the best of the ancestral halls in Longnan, Quannan, and Dingnan counties. The entire ancestral hall is made of brick and wood, consisting of three halls: the upper, middle (**Figure 2**), and lower halls. The main building adopts a symmetrical palace layout along the central axis, with purlin-style beams and a double-eaved hip roof. The side walls are made of blue bricks.



Figure 1. The Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba



Figure 2. The main hall of the ancestral temple

2.3. Basic function

2.3.1. The function of ancestor worship

There is no doubt that the main function of the ancestral temple is to worship the ancestors. The majority of the population in the Wujiuba area of Quannan County came from the Central Plains region and settled there. The villagers of the Li clan attach great importance to their ancestral lineage. Therefore, they raised funds to build an ancestral temple to worship their ancestors and continue their bloodline. Through conducting rituals such as ancestor worship at the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba, they guide the thoughts and behaviors of the Li family members or members of the same clan, emphasizing the blood relationship among the family members, strengthening the clan consciousness and family identity of Li family members, and enhancing the cohesion of Li family members.

The Hakka ancestral halls are important venues for maintaining the unity and harmony of Hakka clans or family lines. Along with the ancestral halls, the Hakka family genealogies jointly promote the harmonious unity of Hakka clans or family lines. Generally speaking, the construction of ancestral halls is to honor and comfort the spirits of ancestors, while compiling family genealogies is to clarify the origin of the family or clan [2]. In the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba, compiling family genealogies is one of the important functions of this ancestral hall. The Li family genealogy interacts with the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba, connecting the blood ties and family affection of the Li family in Wujiuba.

2.3.2. Educational regulatory function

The Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba is a traditional public building of the Wujiuba community. Apart from the sacrificial activities held at specific times, the ancient clan would also set up private schools in the ancestral hall to educate the children of their own community. Descendants of this clan or family line could study basic knowledge at the private school run by the ancestral hall for free or by paying a small amount of tuition, in order to cultivate the descendants of their own community. Those with exceptional talents would be given special attention for the purpose of promoting the continuation and development of the clan or family line. According to the records in the Annals of Quannan County and the Li Family Genealogy, during the Hongwu period of the Ming Dynasty, Youyan Li, Youjiao Li, Youmin Li, and others from the

Li family successively held positions such as the Governor of Nantan Prefecture, the Superintendent of Changde Prefecture, and the Director of Shaowu Prefecture. During their terms of office, they were honest and diligent, serving as role models for future generations. From the 1950s to the early 21st century, the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba still fulfilled the educational enlightenment function of the Li clan, serving as an enlightenment classroom to educate the descendants of the Li family of Wujiuba and the surrounding villages.

At the same time, the ancestral hall plays a role in regulating the behavior of family members and maintaining the harmony and stability of the village within the clan or family lineage. The Li clan of Wujiuba would stipulate clan rules or precepts in the ancestral hall, such as "Be filial to elders and be honest and upright", to maintain the harmonious order among the Li family members. One or several people with higher seniority and prestige would be elected from the Li family to serve as the representative or delegation of the Li family. The representative or delegation would regulate and standardize the behavior of the clan members through the clan rules.

2.3.3. Cultural and entertainment function

The ancestral temple culture, as an important part of Chinese traditional culture, has the characteristics of continuity and strong cohesion. The ancestral temple culture is directly linked to bloodline culture, regional culture, folk culture, architectural art, and moral norms, etc. [3]. The Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba is the venue where the Li clan holds various folk activities. Most of the Li clan members' weddings, funerals, and other ceremonies are held here, and the ancestral hall also serves as a venue for banquets. The Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba carries almost all the life memories of the Li family members.

3. The contemporary dilemma of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba

3.1. Degradation of the traditional functions of ancestral halls

The Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba, Quannan County, Ganzhou City, as a traditional sacrificial building of the Li clan, was originally built with the purpose of "worshiping ancestors and uniting relatives." For thousands of years, the functions of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba have been constantly changing and developing to meet the needs of society in different periods. Eventually, it has formed traditional functions such as ancestral worship, education and regulation, and cultural entertainment. Villagers carry out various activities in the ancestral hall, such as sacrificial activities on important festivals and weddings, funerals, and other activities of the clan members. Up to now, the original functions of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba are weakening, and the effects of various functions are different. According to the field investigation, the Li family members still retain the practice of paying homage at the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba during major festivals such as the Spring Festival and the Qingming Festival. The sacrificial function of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba has been preserved and continued. However, for the protection of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba, it is no longer used as the kindergarten of Wujiuba. At the same time, it restricts or even prohibits Li clan members from conducting wedding, funeral, and marriage-related rituals in the Ancestral Hall. The traditional functions of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba, such as education and regulation, cultural inheritance, and wedding and funeral ceremonies, have weakened and have a relatively weak effect.

3.2. Decreased utilization of Ancestral Hall

The usage rate of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba in Quannan County, Ganzhou City is relatively low. Apart from when major festivals are celebrated and special events are held in the village, the number of people entering the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba is relatively low. During non-holiday or non-special event days, the number of villagers entering the ancestral hall drops sharply, and the total number is less than half of the active period. Although the Dajishan Town Government has transformed the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba into a new-era cultural practice center and an education base for family virtues and family traditions in Quannan County, the cultural public services and cultural publicity activities carried out in the ancestral hall are relatively few, and the service forms are rather monotonous. Moreover, villagers have low recognition and low participation in these services and activities. As a result, the ancestral hall has not been fully utilized.

4. Innovative approach to preserving traditional functions in an active and dynamic manner

4.1. The function of selective continuation of sacrificial worship of ancestors and protecting cultural heritage sustainability

Currently, the Li clan of Wujiuba still maintains the tradition of ancestor worship. The sacrificial and ancestral veneration functions and spaces of the Li clan's ancestral temple need to be preserved and continued. However, the sacrificial practices of the Li clan should be reasonable and appropriate. Harmful sacrificial activities that endanger public safety should be abandoned, such as the large-scale use of fireworks and firecrackers for festival sacrifices in the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba. With many villagers in the temple, the flying and scattering of firecrackers not only causes damage to the temple's structure but also poses a threat to the safety of the villagers. Such activities need to be prohibited. At the same time, the sacrificial ideology of the temple needs to be transformed. In the past, villagers competed in the quantity of sacrificial offerings, and the one who offered more sacrifices had more prestige. This was irrational. The villagers' mindset needs to change. The Dajishan Town Government and the Council of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba can adopt a leading role model approach, encouraging villagers with status and influence in the village to take the lead in reducing or not setting off incense, candles, fireworks, and firecrackers, thereby encouraging and advocating that villagers' sacrificial behaviors be appropriate and offerings be moderate.

4.2. Innovate and develop the normative functions of education, and build a new era educational and cultural base

First, conduct educational activities. Above all, the government of Dajishan Town or the Council of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba can utilize the ancestral hall, in combination with the history of the Li family, to regularly hold lectures on filial piety, helping villagers strengthen their recognition of the family's history and culture [4]. At the same time, it can also publicize the stories of filial piety and respect for the elderly among villagers in other villages of Dajishan Town. Secondly, based on the situation of Wujiuba Village, they can hold the initiation ceremony for children and the adult ceremony every year, teaching them to be virtuous and beautiful, and allowing traditional virtues such as respecting the elderly and respecting elders and teachers to be carried forward. Additionally, the Council of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba can also hold commendation meetings for good deeds within the clan and criticism meetings for immoral behavior,

enabling villagers to supervise each other and maintain the harmony and stability of the village. Finally, the Council can establish a special scholarship fund, awarding scholarships to students from Wujiuba who achieve excellent results in the annual middle and high school entrance examinations. For example, students ranking among the top 30 in the county in the middle school entrance examination will receive a reward of 2,000 yuan; students admitted to the second batch of universities will receive 1,000 yuan; and students admitted to the first batch of universities will receive 2,000 yuan, etc.

Secondly, promote digital empowerment and build intelligent interactive facilities. The government of Dajishan Town can introduce modern science and technology to construct a holographic interactive wall in the main hall of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba. By integrating the clan genealogy of the Li Clan Temple, it can showcase the architectural evolution of the Temple at different periods, such as the Ming Dynasty, the Qing Dynasty, the Republic of China period, and the present day. It can also display and recreate the stories of the ancestors' migrations of the Li Clan. Visitors can touch the wall to trigger the switching of different time periods' scenes, and they can also unlock the stories of the clan branches and learn about the deeds of outstanding Li family members, thereby enhancing the entertainment value.

4.3. Innovation extends the cultural and entertainment functions, and revitalizes the space of the ancestral hall

First, after reserving the dedicated space for sacrifices and major ceremonies at the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba, the daily usage value of the ancestral temple was expanded through refined functional zoning [5]. For instance, a section was set aside in the main hall to create a reading area to meet the leisure reading needs of the villagers. Additionally, the main hall can also serve as a "cultural interaction area," where regular activities such as showcasing and experiencing traditional Hakka handicrafts, such as making mozai and leaf cakes, can be held. Such space expansion has increased the space utilization rate of the ancestral temple. At the same time, the government of Dajishan Town can also innovatively create cultural publicity walls within the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba, vigorously promoting the material and intangible cultural heritage of Wujiuba and even the entire Dajishan Town, such as mozai, lazi, and Che Ma Deng Performance, etc.

Secondly, innovate traditional festivals and sacrificial ceremonies to make them conform to modern needs. In the past, during important festivals, various folk performance activities were held in the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba, such as the Quannan Che Ma Deng Performance and other folk performances. During major festivals like the Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, the government of Dajishan Town can organize and invite the Quannan Hakka Folk Performance Troupe to perform at the Temple, including the Quannan Che Ma Deng Performance and the Tanfang Juren Dragon Performance, to enrich the cultural life of the villagers. At the same time, the government of Dajishan Town can work jointly with the Council of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba to regularly organize rural opera performances, such as Gannan Tea-picking Opera in the Temple, to inherit the non-material cultural heritage of Gannan Hakka, enrich the daily life of the villagers in Wujiuba, and increase the utilization rate of the Li Clan Temple. Additionally, based on the actual situation, the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba can still be used as a venue for villagers in Wujiuba to hold weddings and funerals, to continue the rural traditions of Wujiuba, and to hold activities such as weddings, funerals, and other events in the clan temple, in order to reduce the occupation of other places in Wujiuba and make full use of the space of the temple, and continue the rural customs of Wujiuba.

5. Conclusions

This article summarizes the historical evolution, architectural style, and functional characteristics of the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba, Quannan County, Ganzhou City through field investigations and literature reviews. Based on the current situation and the overview obtained from the field investigation, it is analyzed and pointed out that the Li Clan Ancestral Hall of Wujiuba currently has problems such as the degradation of the original function of the ancestral hall and the low utilization rate of the ancestral hall. Finally, based on the analysis of the current protection and utilization status of the ancestral hall and the identified problems, combined with the actual conditions of Wujiuba Village, an innovative and dynamic protection path for the traditional functions of the ancestral hall is proposed. This includes selectively continuing the ancestral worship function of the ancestral hall, integrating contemporary ideas, innovating and developing the educational and normative functions of the ancestral hall, creating a platform for showcasing Hakka intangible cultural heritage, and enriching the cultural life of the villagers in Wujiuba Village.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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